



Hingkanonta, Lalita (2013) *The police in colonial Burma*. PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London

<http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/17360>

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

When referring to this thesis, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given e.g. AUTHOR (year of submission) "Full thesis title", name of the School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination.

The Police in Colonial Burma

Lalita Hingkanonta

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in History

2013

Department of History
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

Abstract

The thesis considers a number of important aspects/themes of the police in colonial Burma. It first seeks to establish the numerical strength of both the civil and military police, before examining the critical issue of race and the racial composition of the police, that is British and Indian domination of the higher ranks and the limited presence of Burmans, restricted to marginal roles. The thesis then considers a major re-organization of the police that took place in the later 1880s, following the final annexation of the Burmese kingdom. This is followed by a chapter on the socio-economic condition of the Indian military police in Upper Burma. Then, the thesis advances to explore the arguments put forth at the time for the alleged high levels of crime in colonial Burma, and the effectiveness of the police in suppressing crime. The final chapter describes and analyses the police in Burma during the 1930s, when it faced its most severe challenges. The thesis focuses on three central themes. The first is the issue of consent, and the extent to which the colonial administration had to use coercion to maintain the political and social order, particularly in the final full decade of British rule. The second critical theme is to consider how the policing of colonial Burma might be assessed: how might success be determined. And, finally, the crucial theme of race is approached as a respond to the question of how Burma became policed largely by foreign police and how the indigenous reacted to it.

Declaration for PhD thesis

I have read and understood regulation 17.9 of the Regulations for students of the School of Oriental and African Studies concerning plagiarism. I undertake that all the material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables	v
Map	vi
1 Introduction	1
2 Locating race in the Burma police	46
3 Re-organizing the police in the 1880s	89
4 Feeding the Indian military police	124
5 Police and crime	153
6 The police in a time of crisis	202
Conclusion	238
Glossary	263
Bibliography	267

Acknowledgements

I owe a great debt to Professor Ian Brown whose supervision and support have given me deeper understanding of history, life, and, above all, dedication. My heartfelt thanks go to John Okell, the true *saya-gyi* of Burmese, whose great depth of knowledge has constantly driven me to bring this thesis into fruition. His family also gave me endless encouragement during a time of crisis. I genuinely admire their generosity. I would like to thank also U Thaw Kaung, Daw Saw Nan Nwe and the staff at the National Archives of Myanmar, U Ba Aye and U Khin Maung Maung for their valuable eye-witness views on the colonial police, Mahasarakham University for partial funding and SEASREP Foundation for their financial support for Burmese language learning in Rangoon in 2009. I am particularly thankful to Professor Kei Nemoto, Tharaphi Than and Noriyuki Osada who have commented on my thesis and just generally being a good company, to Robert H. Taylor and Maitrii V. Aung-Thwin for thought-provoking comments, and to Dr Elizabeth Moore initially for her kind words and inspiration he has often given to me.

During years of doing this research, my parents and the rest of my family have stood firmly by my side. I owe so much to them. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Thanongsak Hanwong with whom I have shared inspirational conversation. His generosity and kind support are also crucial in the completion of this thesis.

List of Tables and Figures

		Page
Table 1	Total of Civil and Military Police in Burma, 1867-1939	71
Table 2	Comparative Number of Civil Police in Burma, 1890 and 1910	73
Table 3.1	Indian Races in the Burma Military Police Force, 1888-1905	74
Table 3.2	Indian Races in the Burma Military Police, 1910-1925	76
Table 3.3	Indian races in the Burma Military Police, 1929-1938	78
Table 4	Statistics of Violent Crime, 1913-1922	155
Table 5	Comparative Salary of Subordinate Police in Burma, 1920	165
Table 6	Crime Statistics in Lower Burma, 1901-1910	191
Figure 1	Total of Civil and Military Police in Burma, 1867-1939	20
Figure 2	Comparative Numbers of Civil Police in Burma by Division, 1890 and 1910	23
Figure 3	The Burma Civil Police, 1867-1939	25
Figure 4	The Burma Military Police, 1886-1939	28



Map of Burma
(With key towns and cities)

Introduction

Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be.¹

Rudyard Kipling's poem 'Mandalay' might not be seen as an imaginative opening for a thesis on the police in colonial Burma. But it points to a paradox.

The romantic imagining of Burma, projected by Kipling and others, belied an often grim reality. Burma was the least populated province of British India (apart from Assam) yet the 'most criminal'.² Here surely was a territory which demanded a strong and efficient police force. Yet throughout the colonial period, Burma's police were seen as weak and

¹ Rudyard Kipling, *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*. Ware: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994, p. 430.

² G.E. Harvey offered the following comparison: 'England and Wales, with 40 million people, have 140 murders a year; Burma, with only 15 million, had 900.' Harvey gives no date for these figures. G.E. Harvey, *British Rule in Burma*. London: Faber and Faber, 1946, p. 38.

ineffective: and the Burmese themselves, or specifically the Burmans,³ were regarded as ill-fitted for police work. Indians could be employed as sentries, treasury and gaol guards, and, crucially, in the military police. But the Burmans and some others among the local peoples were restricted to the more modest civil police, or assigned to office posts.

The colonial administration was unwilling or unable to reinforce sufficiently the local police presence. According to a contemporary observer, Sir Herbert Thirkell White, British India treated the province of Burma with 'unsympathetic parsimony.'⁴ Moreover, after the annexation of Upper Burma in 1885, perhaps influenced by Kipling's romantic imaginings, a number of young British officers sailed for Burma only to discover a grim and dreary reality. Sir Herbert explained:

The majority had a hard and disappointing life, waiting long for the realization of their dreams. The story of the Burma Civil Police is one of home deferred, and of weary plodding through

³ During the colonial period and beyond, while 'Burmese' was generally used to refer to the Buddhist-oriented people living in Burma Proper, 'Burmans' referred, in a more specific sense, to the ethnic Burmans (*bama*) whose characters, in the colonial point of view, differed greatly from the rest of the Buddhist peoples of Burma such as the Shans or Arakanese. Throughout this thesis, these terms will be used interchangeably but, as a rule, 'Burmans' will be used to differentiate them from the rest of Burma's ethnic groups.

⁴ Sir Herbert Thirkell White, *A Civil Servant in Burma*. London: Edward Arnold, 1913, p. 155.

many dismal years. It is greatly to the credit of its officers that they did well under such depressing conditions.⁵

Such 'depressing conditions' were also vividly illustrated in George Orwell's first novel *Burmese Days*. The plot reaches its climax in the grotesquely-described suicide of John Flory, the main character, a British teak merchant who struggled and ultimately failed to survive in the narrow, if not claustrophobic, British community. Many British officials clearly hated Burma: the cost of living in the province was the highest in British India, the climate was excessively hot and damp, and there were, in the early days at least, no hill stations, except perhaps Maymyo.⁶ And Burma's apparently rampant criminality would have discouraged all but the most optimistic of new British recruits to the police.

The origins of the colonial police force in Burma

The formation of the police in colonial Burma was a product of British rule in India, particularly in the adjacent Bengal. The police in a modern sense – of organized troops, systematically trained to prevent and detect small- and

⁵ Ibid., p. 158.

⁶ A senior British official noted in 1886: 'This dislike of Burma was illustrated the other day when we tried to reclaim for Burma [two British officials] who had been transferred to Bombay. Both gentlemen strenuously resisted. They even said they would rather throw up the service than return to Burma, after having enjoyed the pleasantness of the Bombay presidency. As both of them had private means, they might have carried out their threat if the matter had been pressed.' Cadre of Police Officers for Upper Burma [Confidential], Memorandum by C. Bernard, 25 January 1886, National Archives Department Myanmar [henceforth NADM], File No 582 A, p. 6.

medium-level crime and social unrest – was not established immediately after the first two extensions of British rule, in 1826 and 1853. Although the term ‘police’ was widely used from the time the first British officials set foot in Burma, the presence was far different from the colonial police of the late 19th century. As early as 1825, the first ‘police’ station (sometimes known as *thana* or *thannah*) was established in Arakan as part of the ‘immediate pacification of the countryside’.⁷ Each police station was staffed by one British official, a number of Indian sepoy, and a few Arakanese.⁸ With a total population in Arakan of just under 100,000,⁹ the police presence was slight. In essence, the police were to assist the army in suppressing dacoit bands and to undertake beat patrols. Crime was extremely light, or perhaps passed undetected, and the police were, by and large, dependent upon the village headman or circle headman (*kyun-ok*) in maintaining social order. At the same time, the British introduced to their new territory the surveillance of suspicious characters and suspects. The marked increase in crime in Britain in the wake of the Industrial Revolution had led to increased surveillance, underpinned by the belief that crime could be controlled by keeping a close watch on those individuals, particularly in an industrializing society, who were developing anti-social behaviours.¹⁰ In Arakan, by the late 1820s, heads of divisions (known as *kyauks*) were

⁷ R.M. Hall, “Early Days in the Police in Arakan, 1825-1828,” *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 28 (1938), p. 193.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁹ G.E. Harvey, *British Rule in Burma*, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

required to produce a list of suspect characters in their area, the list being forwarded to the Commissioners. Surveillance was also undertaken by village headmen and their assistants.

In Tenasserim, because of its distance from India and its larger population, the police establishment was very different from that in Arakan. In essence, policing was secured through the local headmen, rather than through Indian sepoy and officers in police stations, as in the other British territory to the west. In this early period, Tenasserim was under the British administration at Prince of Wales Island (Penang). The commissioner was A. D. Maingy, who insisted that the traditional Burmese administrative system should not be abandoned. The first police establishment in Tenasserim reflected Maingy's close study of the local administration under the Burmese monarch.¹¹

The first police establishment in Tenasserim was at Mergui. The district was rather small and thinly populated. The police generally operated within the stockade of the town. In Mergui, a *Soogee* (later represented as *thugyi*, meaning chief or headman)¹² acted as a representative of the

¹¹ Aung Myo, "Police Administration in Myanmar (1885-1945)" (PhD diss., University of Mandalay, 2007), p. 43.

¹² As early as 1826, *thugyis* were categorized into 3 classes. The first class *thugyi* was superintendent of a substantial district, the second class *thugyi* was mainly responsible for smaller districts, and the third class *thugyi* was simply a village headman. The Report of Mr. Fullerton from Mr. Maingy, 16 May 1826: in *Selected Correspondence for the years 1825-1826 to 1842-1943 in the Office of the Commissioner Tenasserim Division*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1928, p. 40.

government and was equivalent to a Superintendent of Police. He was responsible for maintaining order in the town and would report daily to the *Tseetkay* (also *Tseetkè* or *Sitke*, a Head Native) and then to the Commissioner. He was also responsible for sending serious offenders to the stockade.¹³ Under the *thugyi*, there were watchmen who sent in reports on offenders or suspicious individuals who had no apparent livelihood. The *thugyi* would give permission to hold such individuals before they were sent to the Commissioner.¹⁴

Outside the stockade, authority, similar to that of the *thugyi* in the stockade, was held by elected village headmen and *gaungs* (rural police officers), who reported crime and any threat to public order either to the *thugyi* or directly to the colonial administration. Every six months, registers of births, deaths, and marriages would be forwarded to the *thugyi*. Watchmen were recruited among village folk to detect and arrest offenders and suspicious individuals.¹⁵ In the interior, the population was said to be so sparse that a police presence was unnecessary.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁴ Regulations for the Establishment of Police in the Town of Mergui within the Stockade, 1825, pp. 341-43, in *The Burmese War 1823-1828*: IOLR/H/667.

¹⁵ Regulations for the Administration of Justice and Establishment of Police in the Province of Mergui, 1825, pp. 344-77, in Ibid.

¹⁶ A.D. Maingy to the Governor, Robert Fullerton, 22 October 1825, p. 368, in Ibid.

Although the British preferred to keep the local policing administration intact, population growth and the increasing intrusion of colonial administration meant that in time the need arose to develop a larger police presence. This was later reinforced by the 'weary and uncongenial task of pacification' after the second Anglo-Burmese War.¹⁷ While the village police were maintained, the first Inspector-General of Police was appointed in Pegu in 1861, taking over the policing responsibilities previously held by the Deputy Commissioners.¹⁸

The British administration was frequently reinforced and reorganized in this period. But the organization of the police in Burma remained more or less the same from the late 1820s to the early 1860s, particularly in its dependence on native officers. The first systematic organization of the police in British India, including Burma, began with the introduction of the Police Act, 1861, which aimed to make the police 'a more efficient instrument for the prevention and detection of crime.'¹⁹ The Act gave authority to the Inspector-General of Police and District Superintendents of

¹⁷ J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, p. 40.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

¹⁹ P. Hari Rao, *The Indian Police Act (Act V of 1861) and the Indian Police Act (III of 1888) and the Police (Incitement to Disaffection) Act (XXII of 1922) with Commentaries and Notes of Case-Law thereon*. Triplicane: Madras, 1927, Preamble, p. 5.

Police to 'make rules' regarding the organization of the police force.²⁰ However the Inspector-General of Police worked under the authority of the local government. The latter, not the Inspector-General of Police, could sanction the deployment of additional police resources in times of need or in 'disturbed or dangerous districts'.

The evolution of the police in British Burma after the introduction of the Police Act, 1861, was interrupted by the disintegrating relationship with the still independent Burmese kingdom, the war of 1885, and in particular the subsequent pacification campaign. Troops were brought in from India to suppress the extreme disorder that occurred following the final annexation of 1885. The methods used were often brutal: houses belonging to rebel sympathizers were moved and some villages were burnt down.²¹ Even after the rebellions were broken, military garrisons remained for the prevention

²⁰ Ibid., Section 12: 'Power of Inspector-General to make rules:- The Inspector-General of Police may, from time to time, subject to the approval of the State Government, frame such orders and rules as he shall deem expedient relative to the organisation, classification and distribution of the police-force, the places at which the members of the force shall reside, and the particular services to be formed by them; their inspection, the description of arms, accoutrements and other necessities to be furnished to them; the collecting and communicating by them of intelligence and information, and all such other orders and rules relative to the police-force as the Inspector-General shall, from time to time, deem expedient for preventing abuse or neglect of duty, and for rendering such force efficient in the discharge of its duties.'

²¹ Quoted from *Report on the Administration of Burma, 1885/6*, p. 6; and Sir Charles Crosthwaite, *The Pacification of Burma*. London: Edward Arnold, 1912, p. 105; in Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 201.

of crime and social disorder in colonial Burma. In other words, the use of the military in the policing of colonial Burma was well established. Consequently, the regular police, or the civil police, were rather marginal, overshadowed by the military police on one side and village policing on the other. The civil police were unarmed: in essence they were commonly reduced to administrative jobs.

The British colonial administration saw the policing of Burma essentially in terms of the suppression of 'heinous' crime, and in particular the high rate of rebellion, robbery, and disorder — in the words of Thant Myint-U, the 'coming together of three distinct though related elements: banditry, rising patriotic sentiment, and millenarianism'.²² But this core concern did not involve the civil police. Suppressing bandit gangs was undertaken by the armed military police with help from local elites: violent nationalist views expressed in the press were suppressed through the censorship regulations: and outright rebellion was a matter for the military and the judiciary. Until the 1890s, there were approximately 7,000 troops (3,000 British and 4,000 Indian) stationed in Upper Burma, and a much larger number of military police, very few of whom were Burmans.²³

The colonial making of Burmese identity

An important theme in the history of the police in colonial Burma was the racial composition of the force, and the commonly expressed British view

²² Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, p. 202.

²³ Quoted from *Report on the Administration of Burma, 1887/8*, p. 19: in *Ibid.*, p. 208.

that the Burman would not make a 'good' policeman. However, one of the most prolific British officials in Burma, Sir James George Scott, widely regarded as a sympathetic scholar and colonial administrator, argued that the Burmans were the 'bravest in all the realms of Zampoodipa [the world].'²⁴ Less encouragingly, he also argued that Burmans were 'a sad bully': and moreover that they were so innately proud of themselves that their relations with other races, whom they thought inferior, was poor: 'It is different with other races —some perhaps aboriginal, some invaders of Burma as much as the present ruling sept [the British]. The Chins, the Karens, and, in some degree, even the warlike if simple Shans, have all suffered in common with weaker nationalities from the cunning and braggadocio of the Burman.'²⁵

It seems clear that throughout the colonial period, many British disliked or perhaps feared this alleged character of the Burmese. George Orwell's *Burmese Days* includes a scene in which Burmese villagers protest against an arbitrarily coercive British presence, represented by a timber merchant named Ellis. Ellis had previously attacked a group of Burmese boys: in Orwell's words, the boys were

a row of yellow, malicious faces – epicene faces, horribly smooth and young, grinning at him at deliberate insolence. It was in their mind to bait him, as a white man. . . . They were trying openly to provoke him, and they knew that the law was on their side. Ellis felt his breast swell. The look of their faces,

²⁴ Sir James George Scott, *The Burman: his Life and Notion*. London: Macmillan, 1882, p. 433.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 437-38.

jeering at him like a row of yellow images, was maddening. He stopped short.²⁶

The perceived hostility of the Burmese to British rule discouraged the recruitment of Burmese, specifically Burmans, into the police. In addition it was believed that Burmans would find low-paid police work unattractive: a quarter of police had resigned in 1867 and a further 14 percent in 1871.²⁷ The British therefore turned to the Karen, and indeed a re-organization of the Burma police in the late 1880s recommended that the proposed military police battalions should be exclusively composed of Karens and Indians.²⁸ Burman recruits into the police were invariably seen as inefficient, at best. Sir Herbert Thirkell White caught this view:

You may drill Burmans till they look as smart as soldiers of the line . . . But so far it has not been found possible successfully to train them in habits of discipline and method ... on reaching a police post a few hundred yards from the frontier, one found the great gate ajar, the watch-tower empty, and the sentry either absent on his own more or less lawful occasions, or peacefully sleeping with his musket by his side.²⁹

²⁶ George Orwell, *Burmese Days*. London: Penguin Books, 1989, p. 252.

²⁷ *Report on the Police Administration of British Burma for the Year 1872*: Rangoon, Whittham Press, 1873, p. ix.

²⁸ *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1890*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1891, Resolution, p. 2.

²⁹ Sir Herbert Thirkell White, *A Civil Servant in Burma*, pp. 78-79.

But in some circumstances, a Burman police force was indispensable: their knowledge of the country, tolerance of the harsh climate, or simply the fact that they 'know more of the feelings of the people' were essential.³⁰

The emergence of the military police

The colonial military police was not a Burman institution. It recruited principally among the martial races in India but also among the non-Burmans in Burma. It was usually a coercive force, a punitive force for use in those circumstances in which the civil police, mostly Burmans, would be ineffective but where the regular military would be too expensive. The colonial military police was modeled on the Royal Irish Constabulary and was particularly active towards the end of colonial rule.³¹ However, Aung Myo has argued that the military police rose to prominence during the pacification of Upper Burma, when they became 'a main weapon', rather than the army, in suppressing dacoit gangs operating in Upper Burma and in the frontier areas.³² In Madras Presidency, the armed police had been used as a substitute for the military, for fear of provoking mutiny. The force

³⁰ Sir Charles Crosthwaite to Sir Herbert Thirkell White, 4 April 1887: IOLR/Mss Eur E254/1.

³¹ Quoted from Tekena N. Tamuno, *The Police in Modern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970, pp. 30-2, 43-6: in David Arnold, "The Armed Police and Colonial Control in South India, 1914-1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 11 (1977), p. 102.

³² Aung Myo, "Police Administration in Myanmar (1885-1945)," p. 129.

had versatility and was usually cost effective: men were recruited locally to avoid additional training and transportation expenses.³³

The character of political agitation and disturbance in Burma in the first half of the 20th century was quite different from that in India. And consequently, the military police in Burma had a distinctly different role and character from that in India. In broad terms, Burma's nationalist movement was elite- and student-centered, which differed considerably from the mass organization of the Indian nationalist movement. In quelling urban protest in Burma, the civil police were to the fore, with the military police used only in extreme cases: in brief the military police were largely held in reserve. The military police, and the military itself, were, however, essential to the suppression of rural protest, notably in suppressing the Hsaya San rebellion at the beginning of the 1930s. Here there was little role for the civil police.

The military police force was established in Upper Burma in 1886, when the first 1,000 and more recruits arrived from India to form the Burma Military Police (sometimes referred to as the Special Police or the Armed Police).³⁴ One year later, the first Military Police Act was introduced. The military police were organized into battalions, or columns, supervised by a British

³³ David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859-1947*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 102-03.

³⁴ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1886*, Rangoon: Government Printing, 1887, Resolution, p. 4; Joseph Dautremere, *Burma under British Rule*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913, p. 179.

battalion commandant. During the first years, a substantial proportion of the recruits were drawn from the more martial ethnic minorities of Burma, such as the Karens and Kachins. The Indian recruits had received little or no training before arriving in Burma. Among the Indian recruits, Gurkhas and Sikhs dominated, for they had always been at the forefront of military operations in India. They were well understood and welcomed by the British officers in Burma but only limited numbers were willing to work in the new province. Moreover, the costs of recruiting in India were high. Even so, the Burma administration was insistent that, as far as possible, Gurkhas and Sikhs must be recruited. One British battalion commandant put the argument strongly:

Men of races other than Sikh, Garhwali, Punjabi-Mahomedan or Gurkha, should be gradually eliminated from the battalion, as they block promotion. They are, as a rule, unable to deal with the men they are brought into contact with. The system should be purely 'caste company' or freely 'mixed company.' Four or five foreigners amongst 100 or 80 'Bhaibunds' have little power, unless they happen to be specially strong men.³⁵

Initially, the Indian military police were employed in simple roles such as sentry, guard, or escort. But their 'fierce look' and their basic ability to carry arms were important to the preservation of order in such a hostile country as Burma. However, the wastage among Indian recruits was extremely high: resignations, desertions, sick leaves, and death were prevalent among the Indian recruits. Much was made of Burma's 'extremely insalubrious'

³⁵ *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1898*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1899, p. 79.

climate and fierce tropical diseases. In 1899, 4 out of 30 Indian military police from the Magwe Battalion died from cholera, malaria, or bowel-related diseases during the rainy season.³⁶

It should also be noted that the functions of the military police and the civil police were quite distinct. The unarmed civil police were responsible for the prevention of crime, with a focus on crime committed by local criminals in the villages and towns. More serious crime, across wider territories and involving dacoits and robbers, or when riots became rebellion, called for the deployment of the military police.³⁷ The military itself was used only when the social order was most seriously challenged.

It is hard to deny that the harsh climate, often dense jungle, and the remoteness of many villages, made colonial Burma extremely difficult to police. In time, the British came to believe that the province might be most effectively policed not by the deployment of the civil and military police alone but through a reinvigoration of the traditional village police structure. The potential of village policing appears to have been realized after the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886, when it was discovered that order might be restored by the deployment of traditional authority. As one British official commented: 'absolute [monarchical rule was considered

³⁶ *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1899*, Rangoon: Government Printing, 1890, p. 55.

³⁷ *Organization of the Police Establishments in Pegu: Memorandum on the constitution of the Police Establishment in British India*, 1860, p. 1: NADM, RG 1/1 (A), Acc No 541, File No 44.

crucial] to help us [the government] in picking up the threads of the old administration, and in dovetailing the new system onto the remains of the old system.’³⁸

The emphasis on village policing might also reflect a British desire to place responsibility onto the Burmese themselves, and thus gradually draw the Burmese out of an inherent lawlessness. The latter perception was well caught in Harold Fielding-Hall’s account of colonial Burma, *The Soul of a People*: Fielding-Hall tells the story of a young Burman servant who steals his master’s money:

The boy was caught in the act of trying to change one of the notes. He was arrested, and he confessed. He was very hard up, he said, and his sister had written asking him to help her. He could not do so, and he was troubling himself about the matter early that morning while tidying the room, and he saw the notes on the table, and so he took them. It was a sudden temptation, and he fell. When the officer learnt all this, he would, I think, have withdrawn from the prosecution and forgiven the boy; but it was too late. In our English law theft is not compoundable. A complaint of theft once made must be proved or disproved; the accused must be tried before a magistrate. There is no alternative. . . . The boy, he [the master] said, was an honest boy, and had yielded to a sudden temptation.³⁹

³⁸ C. Bernard, Cadre of Police Officers for Upper Burma, 25 January 1886: NADM, File No 582 A.

³⁹ Harold Fielding-Hall, *The Soul of a People*. London: Macmillan, 3rd ed., 1903, pp. 93-94.

Perhaps Fielding-Hall was suggesting that there were substantial differences between the European and the Burman understanding of crime. Despite the master's sympathy towards the boy, the magistrate 'did not see matters in the same light at all . . . he was unable to treat the case leniently.'⁴⁰ The boy was sentenced to a six-month imprisonment. This imagining of the Burman failure to grasp the absoluteness of the rule of law was a common theme in colonial Burma. It was also evident that the Burman did not grasp that colonial law would punish in order to set a deterrent. This was certainly the magistrate's thinking: 'It was becoming quite common for servants to steal their employers' things, and they generally escaped. It was a serious matter, and he felt himself obliged to make an example of such as were convicted, to be a warning to others.'⁴¹ This might be seen as part of the British colonial encounter with 'untrustworthy' or 'semi-barbaric' peoples. This important issue that, to a large extent, shaped the way in which the colonial police force was constructed in Burma will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

An overview of the size of the colonial police forces in Burma

The figures regarding the police in colonial Burma look deceptively simple and complete. They appear to be among the most sophisticated statistics produced by the institutions of colonial Burma. These are figures for the different police forces arising from the three annexations, and figures for the different races within the police. Thus in the first decades of British rule,

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 94.

there were relatively few police. In 1867, for example, there were 5,593 police officers and constables in Lower Burma including Arakan, giving a ratio of one policeman per 361 of the population.⁴² According to the annual reports of the police administration of Burma, until the mid-1880s, the total number of police remained around 5,000, rising to around 7,000, at a time when the population of Lower Burma was between two and three million.⁴³ With the establishment of the military police and the severe disturbances that followed the final annexation in the mid-1880s, the number of police then rose sharply, from 7,281 in 1885 to 32,807 in 1888.⁴⁴

It might also be noted that the apparent rise in the number of police, particularly after 1888, was possibly misleading. According to John Nisbet:

Reinforcements of troops were at any time obtainable from India, but the available reserve of efficient police was much more limited. ... no time was lost in issuing orders for enlisting, training, and sending over to Burma a large body of police recruited from the warlike races of Punjab and the North-Western Provinces of India. In addition to 2,000 volunteers from the Indian police, and to the ordinary native police force of Lower Burma, 6,530 trained recruits were sent to Upper and

⁴² This is an approximation, calculated from the numbers of police officers and constables in Lower Burma including Arakan in 1886 and the total population of the same area in 1862.

⁴³ S.G. Grantham (comp.), *Census of India 1921, Vol. 10, Burma: Part I*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1923, Table I: Variations of population in the areas of successive censuses.

⁴⁴ *Reports on the Police Administration of Burma*, from 1885 to 1888, Appendices.

Lower Burma during the rainy season of 1886; so that, with the 24,184 troops already in Burma, the total of troops and military police for service throughout the whole province rose to 32,720.⁴⁵

The total figure for troops and military police quoted by Nisbet is similar to that given for civil and military police in the annual report of the police for 1888. Nisbet's account suggests that the sudden leap in the number of police to around 32,000 had taken place in Upper Burma during the earlier stages of the pacification, when the military police were stationed mainly in Mandalay, but that those numbers had not been recorded. The official figures for the military police in 1886 to 1887, at less than 2,000 officers and men, did not reflect the actual strength of the force at that time.⁴⁶ After 1888, the total number of police remained at around 30,000, slipping slightly in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

Even so, Burma was relatively under-populated and perhaps under-policed, certainly until the later 1880s. In the early years of British rule, there were barely 27 people per square mile: 20 years later, with the extension of British rule to Upper Burma, the density of population rose to 49 per square mile. But the sharp rise in police numbers in the 1880s reflected less the extension of British rule into a more densely populated

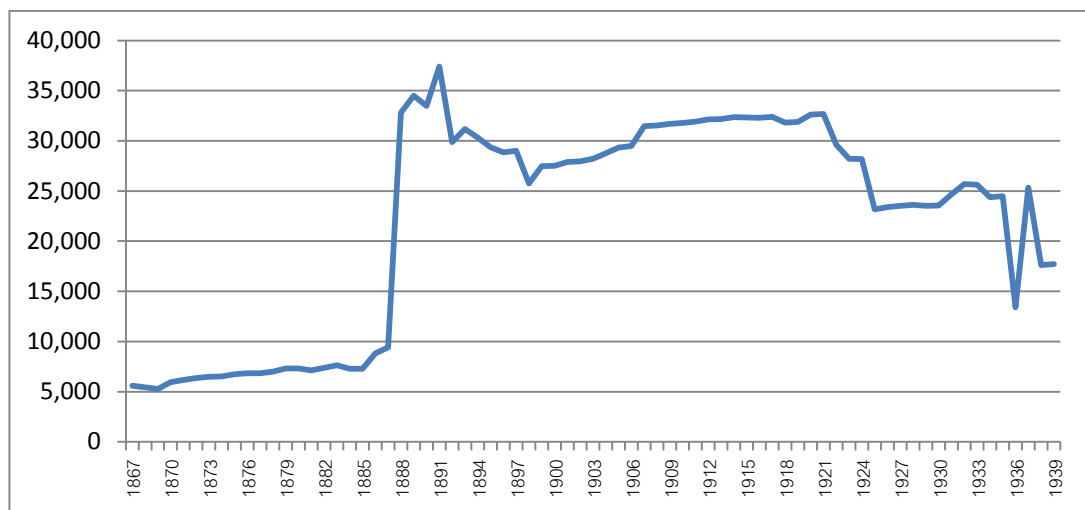
⁴⁵ John Nisbet, *Burma under British Rule and Before*, Vol. I. London: Archibald Constable, 1901, p. 114.

⁴⁶ *Reports on the Police Administration of Burma*, from 1886 to 1887, Appendices for the Military Police.

area than a great increase in crime and unrest following the final annexation of the kingdom.

Figure 1 gives the total number of civil and military police in Burma from 1867, the first year in which figures are available in the *Report of the Administration of Police in Burma*, through to 1939.

Figure 1: Total of Civil and Military Police in Burma, 1867-1939



Source: *Report on the Police Administration of Burma* [title varies] for the years 1867 to 1939

Note –

* The figure for 1936 refers to the Civil Police only.

According to Figure 1, the total number of police increased markedly following the third war, during the period of rebellion and pacification. In part the rise may also have reflected the more thorough compilation of police statistics but there was in reality a substantial reinforcement of the

Indian military police, particularly in Upper Burma. This did not imply a permanent increase in the provincial police force, for the military police, both officers and constables, were volunteers from the Indian police, sepoys lent from the Indian army, and experimental Karen and Shan levies.⁴⁷ They temporarily served as reserves or military detachments for periods of between 2 and 5 years.⁴⁸

The subsequent modest fall in numbers can be explained partly in terms of the eventual restoration of a measure of order — though dacoity remained a major problem — and the difficulties experienced in finding good-quality recruits in India. With the harsh conditions in Burma, including widespread disease and an oppressive climate, many among the first wave of recruits had resigned or returned to India on annual leave and never came back. Some had died in Burma, and most Indian constables suffered poor health because of the climate. Even so, through the first two decades of the 20th century, the total police establishment was kept just above 30,000 men.

In the 1920s, however, the total fell back again, to around 23,000 at the end of the decade. But the strength of the police force was again increased in the early 1930s, perhaps in response to the outbreak of the Hsaya San Rebellion at the end of 1930, and remained at around 25,000 for the remainder of that decade. The low figures for 1938 and 1939 reflect the fact

⁴⁷ Joseph Dautremer, *Burma under British Rule*, p. 179.

⁴⁸ James George Scott, *Burma: A Guide to Practical Information*. London: Alexander Moring, 1906, p. 159.

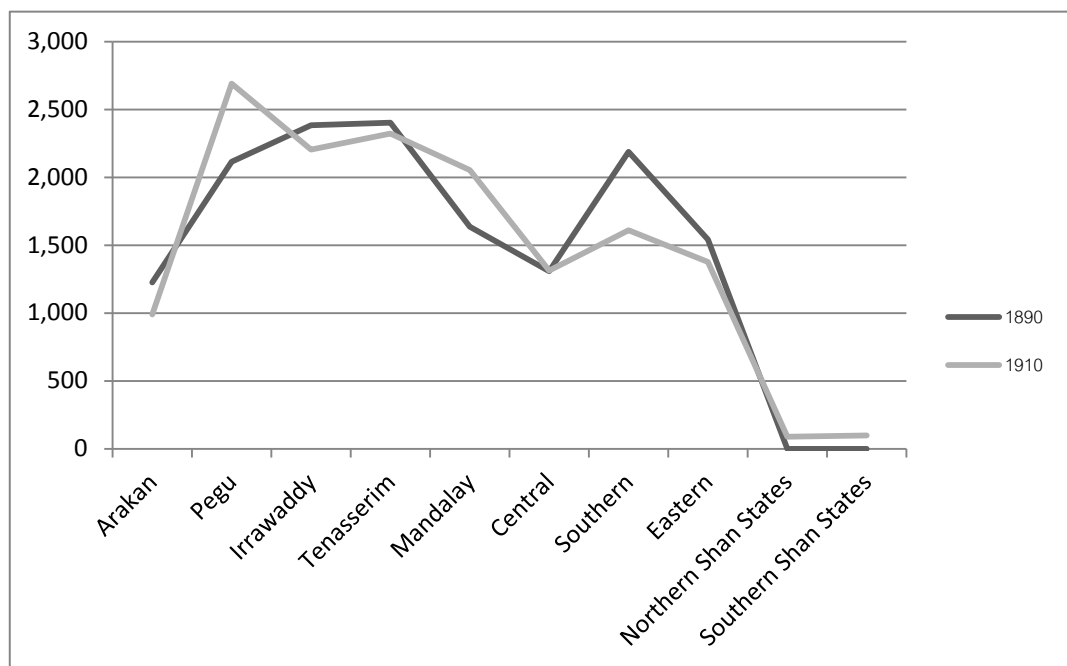
that a major part of the Military Police was transferred into a newly-established Indian Police from 1937.

These figures are perhaps crude but, in broad outline, they suggest one or two interesting lines of argument. It is evident, for example, that there was no decade-upon-decade increase in the total number of police in colonial Burma. Understandably, in times of severe unrest — in the second half of the 1880s or at the beginning of the 1930s — the police establishment was increased. But at other times — for example in the 1920s, as political circumstances allowed and economic pressures demanded — the establishment was reduced. Taking the period from the late 1890s, that is after the inclusion of Upper Burma and the suppression of the severe post-annexation unrest, through to the end of the 1930s, there was no increase in the police establishment, indeed a modest fall. This finding is surprising, for during this same period the population of Burma was rising rapidly, not least because of Indian immigration, and the territory, specifically the Delta, was undergoing rapid economic change and, some would argue, social disintegration. Just considering the crude figures, by the late 1930s there were substantially less police per thousand of the population than there had been at the end of the 1890s.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ In 1899, while the proportion of the police to area (234,564 square miles) amounted to 22.41 and to population (approximately 8.2 million) was 1 to 789, the equivalent figures for 1938 crucially decreased: while British administration expanded to cover 257,756 square miles and the population greatly increased to around 14 million, the proportion of police per area declined to 1 to 19.15 square miles, and 1 to 1,058 for police per capita. Similarly, the number of police stations which numbered 413 by the end of the 1890s was taken down to 356 by 1938; *Report on the Police Administration of Burma*, 1899 and 1938, Appendix.

It would be tempting to conclude that by the end of the 1930s, Burma was less intensively policed. But perhaps this tempting conclusion should be resisted. Much would depend on the distribution of the police across the territory, and also the efficiency of policing. Figure 2 suggests how the former issue — the intensity of policing — might be approached, that is through an examination of the geographical distribution of the police by division.

Figure 2: Comparative Numbers of Civil Police in Burma by Division, 1890 and 1910



Sources – *Report on the police administration of Burma* [title varies], 1867 to 1939

Perhaps it is not surprising to find that Lower Burma was more heavily policed than Upper Burma. In this period, there were some 2,000 police in

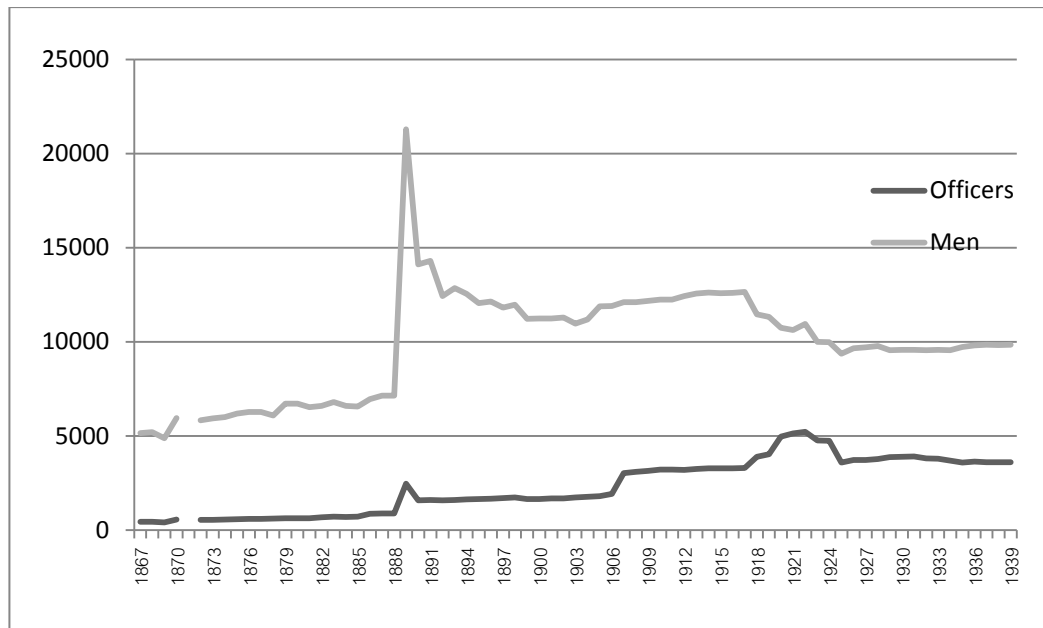
every Lower Burma Division (that is Pegu, Irrawaddy, and Tenasserim). The only division in Lower Burma which remained loosely policed was the remote, mountainous and sparsely populated Arakan. In Upper Burma, even in the most populated division of Mandalay, the number of police exceeded just over 2,000. The only Upper Burma division that saw an increase in police in this period was Mandalay and the two parts of Shan States.

To explore the geographical distribution of the police more deeply is difficult because the British frequently adjusted Burma's divisional administration and many towns were frequently transferred between divisions. To give an example, Thayetmyo in Lower Burma in 1890 was later transferred to the Irrawaddy Division and then to Magwe in Upper Burma. Similarly, Myitkyina in the present-day Kachin State along the Burmese-Chinese border was transferred, as late as 1920, to Mandalay Division. At the same time, new divisions were formed, predominantly for administrative convenience and to reduce costs.

But despite the difficulties in interpreting the data, there seems little doubt that the scarce resources of the police were concentrated, for obvious reasons, on those areas of economic importance and/or high social and political disorder. These were the locations for intense policing, both in urban and rural areas. But the reverse is also important: the absence of police from areas of little economic importance and with social and political order. These are important arguments, to be taken up later in this thesis.

Figure 3 gives the detailed breakdown of police officers and constables in the Burma Civil Police from 1867 to 1939.

Figure 3: The Burma Civil Police, 1867-1939



Source – *Report on the police administration of Burma* [title varies], 1867 to 1939

The Burma Civil Police was formed at the beginning of the 1860s but the first statistical records, on the strength of the force, appeared only in 1867.

Towards the end of the 1860s, there were just under 6,000 civil police in British Burma, the establishment remaining at around that level for the next decade. But from the late 1870s there was a modest increase, to around 7,000, largely in response to a worsening crime situation spilling over from Thibaw's Burma to the north. This was followed by a more substantial

increase in the 1880s and 1890s, arising from increasing activity by dacoit gangs and the increasing rural unrest which followed the annexation of Upper Burma in 1885. However, the most significant increase in the Civil Police establishment took place in 1889 with the integration of the Lower and Upper Burma forces. The sudden peak in that year, 1889, is very striking. In the following year, the establishment was reduced substantially, but then remained stable for the next decade or so.

This drop from the peak of 1889 may be related to the outbreak and suppression of the Shwegyin rebellion of that year. Though short-lived, the Shwegyin rebellion in Upper Burma was one of the strongest challenges to British rule in this period. It is arguable that the rebellion was the catalyst that drove the British to the conclusion that the Burma police urgently needed a major re-organization, increasing the number of Indian police as well as subordinate European officers; increasing the pay of the lower-grade police officers and constables, especially that of police sergeants and officers-in-charge of police station; the establishment of police training schools; and the creation of the Military Police.⁵⁰ The British were aware that although the number of men – though hardly well-trained – was probably sufficient to combat the rapid rise in crime, the leadership of the force was inadequate. Thus there were moves to improve the training of the civil police and, more importantly, to recruit more officers, notably from India, or to retrain and upgrade those already in Burma.

In 1898, although the number of officers rose substantially, the number of men remained roughly constant. A marked increase in the number of

⁵⁰ Aung Myo, "Police Administration in Myanmar (1885-1945)", p. 131.

officers took place again in 1907. More than 1,000 officers were recruited while the number of men was held roughly constant. From that point until the second half of the 1910s, the numbers of officers and men were quite steady – around 3,000 officers and about 12,000 men. A further increase in the proportion of officers occurred in the early 1920s, with an increase in the officer establishment to over 5,000 in 1922. At the same time the number of men was reduced and then remained stable throughout the rest of the colonial period. There was also a fall in the number of officers in the 1930s but, with the number of men falling more sharply, the proportion of officers again rose.

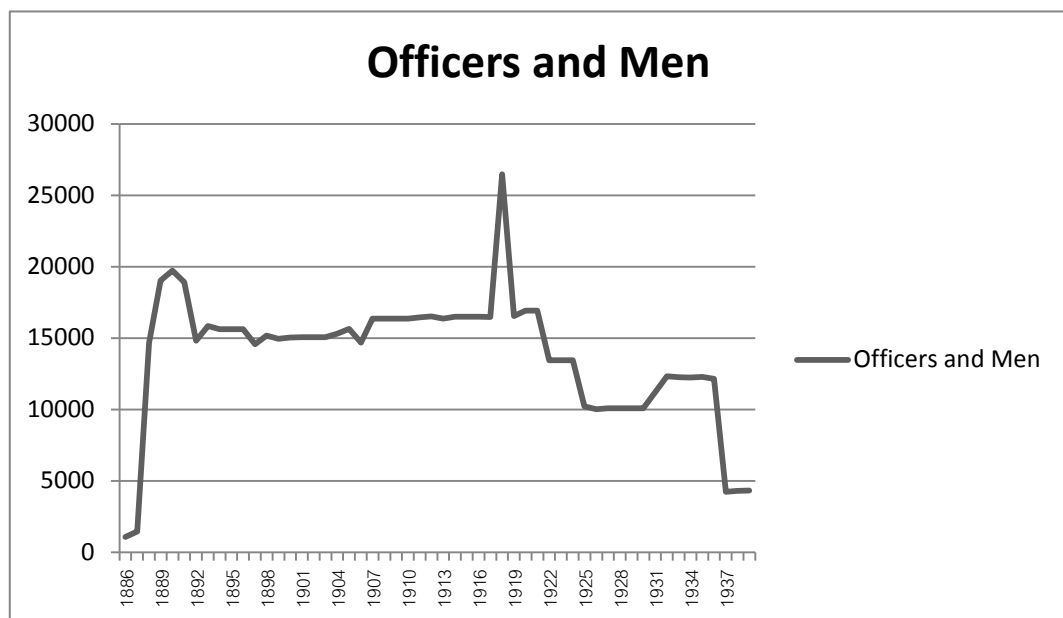
When the civil police had been formed in the 1860s, officers made up barely 8 percent of the force. But from the early 1890s it had been recognized that the presence of a larger cadre of well-trained officers would increase the effectiveness of the force more sharply than simply enlisting men with no policing skills. Increasingly, therefore, the ranks of the untrained were reduced, by lower recruitment, dismissal, or by promotion, with the result that while officers formed 10 percent of the civil police establishment in 1889, that proportion had risen to 25 percent by the end of the 1930s.

Figure 3 also suggests, unsurprisingly, that the total number of civil police rose most sharply during periods of increased unrest and crime, although taking the colonial period as a whole from the late 1890s, the force contracted. Once again, these figures for the total establishment may be misleading, since they say nothing about the geographical allocation of the civil police, as between rural and urban areas, as well as between the

different districts. And such considerations are important when exploring the 'intensity' of policing in colonial Burma.

Figure 4 shows the size of the Burma Military Police force from 1886, the first year in which these figures are recorded in the *Report on the Police Administration*, to 1939.

Figure 4: The Burma Military Police, 1886-1939



Sources – *Report on the Police Administration of Burma* [title varies], 1867 to 1939

Note –

*The figures for 1886-1887 are for Lower Burma only

The Military Police was a new force in Burma, formed about 20 years after the Civil Police. Thus, the figures for the Military Police are possibly more

accurate than those for the Civil Police, because the processes of recruitment were more firmly administered. Military Police constables were largely recruited among certain races from particular areas in India during recruiting seasons, and then transported to Burma in organized groups. Consequently, there was much tighter control over the size and construction of the force, and this may well explain why the annual figures for the Military Police did not fluctuate as much as those for the Civil Police in the period from the late 1880s to the early 1920s. The Burma Military Police was established in 1887 with 122 officers and 1,330 men. A substantial increase then took place, the total rising to 19,033 officers and men in 1889, an increase maintained for the following years, before the establishment then dropped back to around 15,000 in 1892 and 1893. The number of men and officers in the Military Police from the turn of the century through to the early 1920s did not fluctuate greatly, remaining around 1,600 to 1,900 for the officers and around 12,000 to 15,000 for the men. There was then a reduction to 1,107 officers and 8,911 men in 1926 before increasing again in the early 1930s, undoubtedly under the impact of the Hsaya San rebellion. There was then a sharp reduction towards the end of the 1930s, to around 4,000 in 1937, roughly a quarter of the Military Police establishment at the beginning of the 1920s. In contrast, the Civil Police establishment, though declining towards the end of this period, was still relatively high.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the Civil Police and Military Police establishments were of roughly the same size. And they remained comparable in size through much of the decades of colonial rule, certainly during periods of political and social unrest and high crime. However, towards the end of the

1930s, the Military Police establishment was sharply curtailed. In 1939, the last year for which we have reliable figures, the number of Military Police – still largely Indians – was barely 30 percent of the Civil Police.

The creation of both civil and military police forces in colonial Burma (and in other British colonies) reflected not only the different functions and abilities of the two forces but also the influence of the approaches and structures of policing in the metropole, the metropolitan ‘models of policing’.

Models of colonial policing

Generally speaking, the London Metropolitan Police (the Met) and the pre-1921 Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) have been regarded as the models adopted to police the British Empire. The Met, created by Robert Peel in 1829, placed a clear emphasis on the prevention of crime and social unrest. But as crime and threats to the social order grew in Britain’s industrializing cities, increasingly paramilitary forces or even the military itself were called in to maintain control. Here, as Georgina Sinclair has noted, was the influence of the Irish model, and it was this thinking which came to dominate much of the policing of the Empire.⁵¹ Indeed the RIC was widely regarded as the template for the development of colonial police forces. One historian attributes the militaristic strength of the RIC to the alleged warlike

⁵¹ Georgina Sinclair, *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 12.

character of the Irish, or simply their love for fighting.⁵² The initial purpose of the RIC, from the British government's point of view, was to tame a country where the crime rate was extremely high and where agrarian unrest was among the most severe in Western Europe.⁵³ RIC police officers and constables received training similar to that of regular soldiers. Constables were lodged in barracks, and they were trained in the use of machine guns: in effect they formed light infantry units, ready to crush serious disturbances inside and outside Ireland.⁵⁴ In the words of Sir Charles Jeffries, author of a much-cited book on colonial policing:

. . . from the point of view of the colonies there was much attraction in an arrangement which provided what we should now call a 'paramilitary' organisation or gendarmerie armed and trained to operate as an agent of the . . . government in a country where the population was predominantly rural, communications were poor, social conditions were largely primitive, and the recourse to violence by members of the public who were 'agin to government' was not infrequent. It was natural that such a force, rather than one organised on the lines of the purely civilian and localised forces of Great Britain,

⁵² Séamus Breathnach, *The Irish Police from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Dublin: Anvil Books, 1974, pp. 38-39.

⁵³ Quoted from P. J. Stead, *The Police of Paris*. London: Staples Press, 1957, p. 13: in Breathnach, p. 40.

⁵⁴ Anthony Clayton and David Killingray (ed.), *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1989, p. 6.

should have been taken as a suitable model for adaptation to colonial conditions.⁵⁵

According to Richard Hawkins, however, the influence of the RIC on colonial policing has been exaggerated, for he suggests that colonial conditions, different in each territory of course, would eventually come to undermine what was seen as the Irish influence.⁵⁶ For example, in 1909, a commanding officer in the Kenyan police, trained in Ireland along strict RIC lines, expressed disappointment in the local police, for he argued that the local force lacked the 'most salient characteristics' of the RIC, martial qualities and a high level of morale.⁵⁷ Moreover Hawkins argues that the RIC had little influence on the establishment of the Sind Police, the first force created in India following the passing of the Indian Police Act of 1861. He suggests that the Sind Police, recruiting martial races like the Pathans and Rajputs, was designed to mingle with the local society, while the RIC model suggested an imposition on, not integration with the local population.⁵⁸ The Irish model was predominantly semi-military, repressive and rural, while the Met was civil, urban, and generally unarmed.

⁵⁵ Quoted from Sir Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Police*. London: Parrish, 1952, pp. 30-31: in Richard Hawkins, "The 'Irish model' and the empire: a case for reassessment," in David Anderson and David Killingray (ed.), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Richard Hawkins, "The 'Irish model' and the empire: a case for reassessment," in *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

In practice, the models overlapped in the colonies. The 'British policing philosophy' was the colonial instrument for the prevention of crime and the preservation of law. The Met constable was 'both keeper of the Sovereign's Peace and also a representative of the local community who carries out duties that by common law belong to all citizens'.⁵⁹ A constabulary, therefore, is formed from a community of citizens, recruited voluntarily to deter threats to a peaceful society.⁶⁰ But of course this model would not survive in a hostile environment of social violence and heinous crimes. A more oppressive policing model was then required. And it was this overlapping of policing models, the constabulary and the military, that evolved in the colonies, including Burma.

Sources and Literature Survey

In terms of primary sources, this thesis employs mainly English-language colonial records and manuscripts largely obtained from the India Office Records, British Library, but also from the National Archives of Myanmar (The National Archives Department within the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Myanmar) as well as the National Library of Scotland.

The colonial records used for this thesis fall into four main categories, the British Burma Home Proceedings, the Police Departmental Records, the

⁵⁹ Anthony Clayton and David Killingray (ed.), *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1989, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Burma Office Records, and published official reports. The Burma Proceedings is a large collection of daily records – including resolutions, minutes, and correspondence within Burma and between Burma, India, and Britain – covering the period from the East India Company's first contact with the Ava court in the 18th century. According to a leading guide, Andrew Griffin, 'in comparison with correspondence, Proceedings provide information in far greater detail ... and a vast quantity of evidence concerning Burma is preserved within them.'⁶¹ The most systematic and more specialized British Burma Proceedings, including much material on the police, were introduced only in 1887, that is a few years after the annexation of Upper Burma.

In the main, the Burma Proceedings comprise the important correspondence and papers copied and returned to London. However, with constitutional developments in Burma in the 1920s, that included a measure of self-government, fewer matters were now referred to London.⁶² In other words, after 1924, the important Burma materials reported to London were now scattered in the files (mainly under IORL/L/PJ in the case of the police), in annual reports, and in the reports of committees and commissions.

The post-1924 files contain a wide range of records including correspondence, minutes, official reports, as well as newspaper cuttings.

⁶¹ Andrew Griffin, *A Brief Guide to Sources for the Study of Burma in the India Office Records*. London: India Office Library & Records, 1979, p. 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

These are usually large files. In this thesis, two main files have been used for this later period, the 1938 Burma riots files which are separated into three smaller files, and the 'Future Administration of the Burma Police' file, which contains significant material on Burma's post-war reconstruction plans for the police and other departments.

A further important primary source is the departmental police report, published annually from 1867 to 1939. The annual report was generally separated into two parts, covering the administration of the police and then crime. In addition, there are the published official reports of the various committees and commissions appointed to enquire into important or urgent matters: and there are also 'situation reports' as well as newspaper cuttings on crime and on police matters.

The Burma Police Journal (published tri-annually for a short period from 1938 to 1940) is a further source of information on a wide range of issues relating to policing 'technology', tear gas, police dogs, finger-prints. It also provides personal accounts of encounters with notorious criminals, occasionally rather fanciful accounts that should be treated with some caution. The English-language newspapers published in Burma are a further important source. The most important was the *Rangoon Gazette*, including the *Rangoon Gazette Weekly Budget*. Cuttings from the *Rangoon Gazette*, often the voice of the colonial government, providing reports and analysis on disturbances and crime were included in the 'situation report' files. The files also include cuttings from the leading nationalist vernacular press, notably *Thuriya* (The Sun), *New Light of Burma*, and *Saithan*. These

cuttings provide an invaluable source for understanding nationalist attitudes towards the police in colonial Burma.

Among academic studies on the police in the colonial world, David Arnold's 1976 article, 'The police and colonial control in South India', has been highly influential. Subsequently, in the mid-1980s, Arnold published *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859-1947*, which quickly became a standard text for the study of the colonial police. Influenced by the early wave of subaltern studies and the emergence of postcolonial figures such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and in particular Arnold's mentor, Ranajit Guha, and thus employing Gramscian-subaltern theory as his point of departure, Arnold argued that the colonial police stood for state power 'at its most intrusive, oppressive and unheeding'.⁶³ The formation and growth of the police in colonial India required the psychological and mechanical collaboration of the indigenous society, initially through locally-recruited Indian police constables and not-always-successful village policing, for without that assistance, the colonial state would fail to enforce 'the rule of law' and prevent even mild social unrest.⁶⁴ Moreover, the British policing of colonial India reflected in different ways the experience of policing social and political unrest in Britain itself, the consolidation of the colonial perception of 'martial races', and the fear of brutal military intervention, reflecting the long influence of Oliver Cromwell's military coup in the

⁶³ David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859-1947*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ David Arnold, "The police and colonial control in South India," *Social Scientist* 12 (1976), p. 15.

1640s.⁶⁵ Fear of social and political unrest, and fear of military intervention, had laid the foundations for the establishment of the Met in London in 1829.

But the colonies were far different from London. Crime in colonial India, for example, often sprung from agrarian unrest and enduring communal tensions, rather than from working class poverty, as was the case in an increasingly industrialized London. Consequently, the approach to and structure of policing in colonial India was commonly driven by the need to control what was seen as a habitual criminal class. The early years of policing in Madras were haunted by two key events: the assassination of H. V. Conolly, the Malabar Collector, in 1855 by fanatical escaping Mappila prisoners; and the report by the Torture Commission in 1855 which, for the first time, revealed the failure of the police to tackle a persistent rise in crime.⁶⁶ The problem here, it was argued, lay in a weak understanding of the indigenous society on the part of British officials, and in particular, the unwillingness of the colonial police to act strongly against such crimes as robbery, theft, and murder where they affected the local population, on the grounds that this criminality did not threaten the British presence.

In time, however, the emergence of a substantial industrial workforce, and the threat of strikes, and the growing strength of the Indian nationalist movement led to a strengthening of the Indian police by the addition of a

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁶ David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859-1947*, p. 5.

military corps.⁶⁷ The partial militarization of the police ran strongly counter to the British tradition, which took as an article of faith that the military should not be involved in civilian society. But the military was to be employed in India only in extreme circumstances:

The occasions when the government employed its full repressive strength were rare and of short duration. The British certainly did not shrink from the use of violence, but they did see that unless it was balanced by active collaboration and cooperation from within the colonized society the Raj could not continue as a viable political and economic proposition. There were, therefore, important restraints on the government's development and employment of the armed police . . .⁶⁸

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, two leading scholars of colonial Africa, David Anderson and David Killingray, edited two books, *Policing the Empire* and *Policing and Decolonisation*. Here was an attempt to challenge the previously generalized perception of the colonial police as strictly coercive. It was argued that the colonial police were not simply modeled on the Met and the more militaristic RIC. Rather, policing the British Empire had involved a century-long interaction between local circumstances and those metropolitan models.⁶⁹ Little was gained, they argued, in debating

⁶⁷ David Arnold, 'The armed police and colonial rule in South India, 1914-1947', *Modern Asian Studies* 11 (1977), pp. 102, 104.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶⁹ David Anderson and David Killingray (ed.), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, pp. 2, 4.

which metropolitan model was being applied in which colony, whether policing in one colony reflected the Met or the RIC, or both. While the metropolitan models of policing could be said to be omnipresent, policing methods in each particular territory were a product of a complex discourse with local circumstances. In much the same vein, Michael Brogden, a sociologist, has pointed out that the colonies were not simply recipients of European policing. Moreover Britain, in turn, learned much from the colonial policing experience. A high number of British police officers previously served in the colonies but then assumed major appointments at home.⁷⁰

For Peter Robb, in research on policing in rural Bengal and Bihar, the central question has been to explore how the police were influenced by the British belief in Indian backwardness and European superiority – as Robb put it, influenced by ‘[the limited] British ideas about India.’⁷¹ He insists that the use of coercive force in policing the countryside in Bengal was limited, though the British attempted to build a hierarchy of village administration and control because much of the province was hardly

⁷⁰ Quoted from Michael Brogden, ‘An act to colonise the internal lands of the island: empire and the origins of the professional police’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 15 (1987), pp. 179-208; and ‘The emergence of the police: the colonial dimension’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 27 (1987), pp. 4-14: in David Anderson and David Killingray (ed.), *Policing the Empire*, pp. 12-13.

⁷¹ Peter Robb, “The ordering of rural India: the policing of 19th-century Bengal and Bihar,” in *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 136.

accessible.⁷² Policing in India, therefore, cannot be seen in terms of the exercise of British force but rather as an accommodation to local conditions. The colonial government strove to police by consent, at best.⁷³ Perhaps elsewhere in the Empire, notably the white territories, consent would grow naturally. But this was clearly not the case in India or Africa. Indeed often consent simply did not grow, and with more organized political and industrial resistance in the 20th century, British administrations were forced to turn, if reluctantly, to force: the colonial police were armed, more militaristic, and clearly more coercive.⁷⁴ The final phase of British imperialism saw, understandably, the most substantial use of force and coercion.⁷⁵ In India, the police numbers were increased from around 190,000 to 300,000 between 1938 and 1943. In the Gold Coast, the number of armed police doubled between 1945 and 1956.⁷⁶

The increasingly coercive character of colonial policing was encouraged in a perhaps unexpected way. When Ireland became the Irish Free State in 1922, British police officials who had formerly served in the RIC, highly regarded men of great experience, took up posts in the colonial territories

⁷² Ibid., p. 6.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁵ David Anderson and David Killingray (ed.), *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917-65*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

of India, Africa, and the Middle East. In Palestine, these officers made up three-quarters of the 700-strong British *gendamerie*.⁷⁷ In part this reflected a metropolitan fear that local officers might prove to be too sympathetic to rising nationalist demands, and thus fail to defend the established order. It was far better to employ clear outsiders for the most repressive work. Riot squads, 'special police', and auxiliary forces, such as the Police Mobile Force in Nyasaland, the General Service Unit in Kenya, and the Mobile Police Reserve in Cyprus, were established in the final decades of empire. The greater use of police officers from Britain itself, in senior positions, also reflected an increasingly common concern that the local forces were mismanaged and lax. Due to their low pay and lack of self-esteem, the loyalty of local subordinate ranks was by no means secure.⁷⁸ The ineffectiveness of the colonial police service, it was believed, could be improved only by sending out more competent British officers. But acting in the opposite direction was the need, in the final decades of colonial rule, to improve the integrity of the colonial police and to remove its common image as an oppressor: and in this context, educated and experienced indigenous officers could now rise to higher rank. But then the indigenization of the local police could threaten the position of those local minorities which had held prominent positions in the police under colonial rule.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Charles Smith, "Communal conflict and insurrection in Palestine, 1936-48," in David Anderson and David Killingray (ed.), *Policing and Decolonisation*, p. 63.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 13-14.

In a more recent work, Georgina Sinclair has, following Anderson and Killingray, emphasized the conflicting aims of policing at the end of empire – between injecting civilized and kind ‘Britishness’ and policing with greater coercion.⁸⁰ Important in her work has been around 400 first-hand interviews of former British colonial police officers, testimonies and diaries.⁸¹ Sinclair too argues that there was no sole model of colonial policing, not least because the functions and character of the Metropolitan Police and the para-military RIC themselves in reality greatly overlapped. The interaction between the British policing tradition and the stiffened RIC played an important part in shaping colonial policing practices in the British colonies.⁸² Irish-styled musketry drill and military training were popular and insisted on in the colonies, while British criminal law was included in police manuals across the empire.

David Arnold has argued that:

The police were of no less importance to the colonial state’s nationalist opponents and successors. They were a powerful and highly visible element of that state power which the emerging forces of the Congress [in India] sought first to contest and then to capture and subordinate to their own control. Nationalist attitudes towards the police illustrated the contradiction between the party of anti-colonial opposition,

⁸⁰ Georgina Sinclair, *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame, 1945-80*, p. 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

drawn into protracted and often bitter conflict with the police, and the incipient party of government, anxious to preserve and develop the inherited apparatus of state power in furtherance of its own ends.⁸³

And as Arnold further notes, indigenous civilians and politicians were not the only oppressed subjects under the Raj. Indian police officers and the subordinate police were also oppressed and humiliated, in part by their own police superiors but also by Indian nationalist opinion, which saw them, understandably, as defenders of the Raj.

As far as I am aware, the only previous academic study of the police in colonial Burma is the doctoral thesis by U Aung Myo, 'Police Administration in Myanmar (1885-1945)', submitted to the University of Mandalay in 2007. This substantial work contains extremely detailed descriptions of a number of aspects of policing in that period, for example, the weapons employed, and makes great use of the colonial records held at the National Archives Department, Myanmar. It does not seek to establish an overall analytical theme. Jonathan Saha's thesis, 'Misconduct and the Colonial State in Everyday Life: The Irrawaddy Delta, Burma c. 1900', submitted to the University of London in 2010, though making frequent reference to the police, especially the subordinate ranks, is primarily focused on administrative misconduct, rather than on the police as such.

⁸³ David Arnold, 'Police power and the demise of British rule in India, 1930-47,' in David Anderson and David Killingray (ed.), *Policing and Decolonisation*, p. 43.

The structure of the thesis

The chapters in this thesis do not attempt a comprehensive history of the policing of colonial Burma in all its aspects. Rather they focus on detailed *aspects* of the police in colonial Burma, that will allow for a reflection on the broader issues raised in this introduction. In detail, the next chapter attempts to examine the critical issue of race and the racial composition of the police in colonial Burma, in other words, the British and Indian domination of the higher ranks and the limited presence of Burmans in the force, restricted to marginal roles. Then, Chapter 3 examines a major re-organization of the police and the revitalization of village policing that took place in the later 1880s, following the final annexation of the Burmese kingdom. Chapter 4 considers the living conditions of the Indian military police in Upper Burma, apparently treated and fed differently from the rest of the Burma police. Chapter 5 assesses the arguments advanced at the time for the alleged high level of crime in colonial Burma, and explores the effectiveness of the police in suppressing crime. The final substantive chapter describes and analyses the police in Burma during the 1930s, when it faced perhaps its most severe challenges. The Conclusion discusses the colonial administration's war-time post-war reconstruction plan for the Burma police, planning which, interestingly, reflected a critical self-assessment of past defects. Running through all these chapters are the central issues explored in the literature on policing the Empire, and which have been outlined above. It would be useful to restate some of the principal issues now.

The first general issue points to a paradox. The British believed that effective policing, at home and in the Empire, required a measure of consent on the part of the population being policed. And yet in Burma, the dominant elements in the police were foreign, that is British and Indian, and even when the police were drawn from the local population, the Burman presence was marginal. To what extent, therefore, was it possible to secure consent from the Burmese population in these circumstances? The fact that, over time, the most effective policing in colonial Burma was achieved through the military police, in particular in dealing with serious crime, suggests that the search for consent was soon abandoned. And this observation relates to two further general issues — the apparent increasingly coercive character of policing in the Empire in its final decades and the apparently increasing importance of the model taken from RIC. In Burma, perhaps, coercion was to the fore from an early stage, from the establishment of the military police in the 1880s. The grim reality of Burma's lawlessness, apparent from the final decades of the 19th century, established the British approach to the policing of the province from that early point. The final general issue might be put in the form of a question: when assessing the effectiveness of policing in colonial Burma, what standard or which objective should be applied? In no society, of course, would the eradication of crime be seen as an achievable objective. But what level of suppression would, in colonial Burma, be seen as marking success. More importantly, did the British seek the suppression of particular forms of crime, perhaps those forms that more seriously threatened British interests, and were prepared to turn a blind eye to those they could safely ignore?

Locating Race in the Burma Police

Since pre-colonial times, the territory of Burma has been occupied by a number of different ethnic groups, on occasion in tension with each other. From the mid-16th century, lowland Burma became dominated by Burmese rulers, with other ethnic minority groups occupying the frontier uplands, under their own hereditary rulers. With the establishment of British rule in the 19th century, those divisions and tensions remained, indeed were often exacerbated.

Resistance to colonial rule was most forcefully expressed by the Burman majority. This is hardly surprising in that it was the Burman-dominated lowlands that felt the impact of colonial administration most intensively. Armed resistance in the areas previously under the tutelage of the Burmese kings was at its height during the years immediately following the annexation of Upper Burma in 1885, until the end of Sir Charles Crosthwaite's pacification campaign in 1890. As a result, British officials began to see their Burmese subjects as enemies rather than as law-abiding subjects. The pacification phase was fought largely with alien troops – up to 16,000 soldiers were recruited from as far as the Punjab and Nepal to impose order on a hostile society. But ethnic races within Burma were recruited to secure military occupation in the Burman-dominated countryside and in the remote hills of Upper Burma. The fact that Burma

became an administrative unit within British India conveniently allowed reinforcements of British and Indian troops, as well as the establishment of an Indian-dominated Burma Military Police in the late 1880s. The rise of rural unrest, the pacification, the alien Burma Military Police, and the locking in of Burma to India's periphery were crucial events that increasingly detached Burmans from the development of colonial policing as a coercive apparatus for crime suppression, and, increasingly, politically- and economically-driven urban disorder. While the coercive aspects of policing were undertaken mostly by peripheral forces, largely composed of Indian and then the ethnic minorities, Burman civil police were left mostly with clerical work or petty guard duties. The British lack of confidence in the ability of the Burmese recruits to the police to prevent and suppress crime – even to handle weapons with care – created a widely-held belief that the maintenance of law and order in Burma could only be achieved with Indian police, ideally the Indian 'martial races' such as the Sikhs and Gurkhas. The enlisting of Indians and the ethnic minorities had to be insisted upon, it was argued, for both defensive and offensive purposes; that is to say, for defending the population against the attacks of Burmese dacoit gangs, and for attacking the criminals whenever they appeared.¹

The lawless condition of Burma convinced the British both in Burma and India that the new possession required reinforcements of a martial Indian semi-militaristic police force. Indeed, the colonial view of the physical and mental inferiority of the Burman, compared with the Indian, was

¹ Extract from the Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner in the Judicial Department, No. 302-64P, dated 13 January 1888, in Instructions regarding the Civil and Military Police in Upper Burma, in *BBHP* of January 1888: IOLR/P/3117.

established from the early days of the British conquest. From the 1860s, Indians were recruited into the Burma police in preference to Burmans on the common grounds that the latter were hard to drill and discipline and hence were not suited to demanding police work.² The colonial assumption was that Indians, particularly the 'martial races', would make the best recruits. However, recruiting good quality Indian police officers and constables was never simple. To secure their long-term commitment was difficult because the pay and concessions received by police constables were generally lower than that offered to regular soldiers. Moreover, Indian migrants to Burma could secure better wages elsewhere, by working in other parts of the colonial administration or in the more competitive agricultural sector.

The differentiation between the Indian and Burmese police created not only two distinct police forces, namely the civil police and the military police, but also produced other paramilitary forces based on racial categorizations, such as the Burma Rifles, the Field Force, or the Frontier Force, and the Karen Levies.³ Recruits among the civil police were predominantly

² Extract from the proceedings of the Chief Commissioner, in the Home Department No. 209, in *Report on the Administration of British Burma for the Year 1867*. Maulmein: T. Whitam, 1868.

³ The defined role of the Burma Frontier Force was given as follows: 'a body of men trained primarily for the purpose of defending the frontier against raiders and smugglers. These men know every inch of the frontier country.' There were mainly two forms of the Frontier Force in Burma: the mounted infantry and the regular infantry. The former usually consisted of Sikh and Punjabi sepoy – the 'splendid horsemen' – while the latter were mainly composed of indigenous races, usually of more 'wild' and primitive

Burmans and Karens and a few other ethnic minority groups. Power and control were monopolized by a handful of European officers. Indians and Burmans could be promoted to the rank of inspector and head constable, albeit slowly.⁴ Indians, on the contrary, made up a major portion of the military police and some auxiliary forces. All in all, in policing, the differences between the tasks undertaken by the Burmese and those performed by the Indians were clearly demarcated. However, whether one particular police jurisdiction would be composed of more Burmese civil police, Indian military police, Karen levies and so on, depended on a number of factors. In theory, the British sought to ensure that the racial composition of the police would reflect the ethnic mix of the locality. Thus the police in Rangoon and other industrial areas consisted of more Indian elements than in the rest of the country, reflecting the growth of racially-diverse urban towns and cities. But in addition Indian constables were more widely employed in violence-prone areas, especially in Upper Burma despite the fact that the Indian population there was still thin at the end of the 19th century.

This chapter will deal with the complexity revolving around the issue of race as it emerged in the Burma Police. It will explore, for example, the fact

characters, notably the Padaungs (more widely known as the men of the giraffe-necked women) and the Was (the so-called 'head-hunters' of Burma). The British found that these races were mobile and were actually fine soldiering material who adapted quickly to military training and discipline as well as guerilla fighting. *The Burma Police Journal*, 1 (1938), pp. 481-2.

⁴ Sir Herbert Thirkell White, *A Civil Servant in Burma*. London: Edward Arnold, 1913, pp. 5-6, 8.

that the Burman was considered by British officials as a poor recruit for the police and the reasons that underpinned the British belief in the inferior physical and psychological capacity of Burmans compared to martial Indian races (or even non-martial Indians). It will also establish the numbers of Burman, Indian, and ethnic minority police recruits from the official police records. The chapter will also attempt to illustrate the fluctuating trends in the recruitment of the different ethnic groups into the colonial police, including those from Burma as well as those coming from India, in order to establish a central argument in this thesis, that the organization of the colonial Burma police was largely built upon the colonial concept of race, conflicting interests among the races, and in particular the severe British distrust of the Burman as a force for law and order.

Locating race in the Burma Police

It is hard to deny that the police culture in Burma was a British Indian invention. Indeed most colonial structures imposed upon Burma during the first years after the final annexation were imported from India.⁵ It was no surprise that the British gave much weight to the Indian element as an indispensable tool in the suppression of severe unrest. It was often understood that the role of the Indians in Burma was strongly interwoven with the presence of the regular army. But from the late 19th century, after the pacification to the beginning of the Second World War, the sight of the army suppressing unrest was rare in Burma, not least because the regular

⁵ Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 23.

military, which was almost entirely composed of India's martial races, would be expensive to deploy in Burma.

In the late 1880s, as the next chapter will show, the government sought to restore the prestige and power of village headmen to make them into an effective link between the local society and the colonial regime. The revitalization of the village administration ran parallel to the strengthening of the police, whose success would rely on assistance and information given by the village. Despite their rather marginal roles, often as clerical and civil staff who handled the office work, the Burman constables were in fact a pivotal link between the village headmen and the Indian-dominated paramilitary forces, through their command of the local language and sometimes local contacts.⁶ Though opinions among senior officials regarding the physical characteristics of Burmans varied considerably – while some officials were struck by the manly physique of ethnic minorities like the Was and the Muhsos, John L. Christian emphasized that Burmans were among the strongest races found in Burma⁷ – one view commonly shared among the Europeans in Burma was that Burmans had defects so deeply rooted that no amount of military and police training could eliminate them.

⁶ Extract from the Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner in the Judicial Department, -- No. 302-64P, dated 13 January 1888, in Instructions regarding the Civil and Military Police in Upper Burma, in *BBHP* of January 1888.

⁷ An Extract from B.S. Carey, Officiating Superintendent and Political Officer, Southern Shan States, in Proposal to enlist men of the Wa, Muhso, Law and Tai Loi tribes, Southern Shan States, in the Military Police, in *BBHP* of March 1907: IOLR/P/7502; and John L. Christian, *Burma*. London: Collins, 1945, p. 32.

From the first years of British rule in Lower Burma to the early years after the conquest of Upper Burma, as the statistics will show, Burmans numerically dominated the police force. However the resistance that followed the annexation of Upper Burma crucially changed the British view of the Burman, from suspicion to hostility. Burmans, remarked the Chief Commissioner in 1886, 'are incapable of being formed into efficient police ... [showing] their present state of lamentable inefficiency.' An example of the alleged inefficiency might be seen in the desertion and resignation rate from the force by Burmans: in 1878, for example, it was no less than 34.8 percent.⁸ This perceived lack of efficiency, courage, and loyalty on the part of the Burmans would trouble British police officers for the rest of the colonial period.

One might be inclined to think that the ultimate remedy was to train the Burmans to the standard of the Indian police. This was attempted from the early years, first at headquarters and, after 1890, in training schools. It was suggested by one British official that Burmans would need to spend at least one extra month in training above that provided for other races.⁹ But still the results were disappointing, 'like pouring water into a sieve.' However, although it was thought difficult to draw 'good' Burmans into the low-paid

⁸ *Report on the Police Administration in British Burma for the Year 1879*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1880, p. 2.

⁹ From Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Burma to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, No. 307E-359P, dated 9 December 1890, in *Proposals for the re-organisation of the Lower Burma Police, exclusive of the Rangoon Town district, Moulmein Town, and Railway police*, in Index No.5, *BBHP* of December 1890: IOLR/P/3577.

police force, Burmans remained numerically the most significant element in the police administration. Without their local knowledge and their ability to cope with the climate, the colonial police force would barely survive.

Not all British officials came to regard the Burmans as delinquent characters. Sir Herbert Thirkell White, the Lieutenant-Governor of Burma from 1905 to 1910, commented that police work was in fact 'well suited to the idiosyncrasy of the Burmese race', although more discipline and training were needed.¹⁰ Major C.M. Enriquez, a British recruiting officer and an eminent author of various books on the British army in South and Southeast Asia, and on the races of Burma, writing in the 1920s observed that Burmans, thanks to Buddhism, possessed the fine qualities of being 'friendly, witty, generous, poetic, imaginative and debonair ... wayward and passionate'.¹¹ Physically, Burmans were 'a nation of athletes with a genius for games. They are tall and slim, but the chest is often small, so much so that many are rejected [into the military] on that account.'¹² Enriquez was writing a handbook for the Indian Army, and his depictions of the physique and character of the different ethnic groups in Burma and India may be taken as reflecting common colonial perceptions based on ethnological survey for military purposes. However lovable Burmans apparently were, one of the biggest obstacles preventing them from being

¹⁰ Sir Herbert Thirkell White. *A Civil Servant in Burma*, p. 6.

¹¹ Major C.M. Enriquez, *Races of Burma*. Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1924, p. 33.

¹² Sir Herbert Thirkell White, *A Civil Servant in Burma*, p. 6.

good material for the police and for the army in Burma was, in the colonial view, their 'troubled character'. Consequently, they could not be wholly trusted. Moreover, their weakness, lack of endurance, courage and discipline, so the argument ran, were major reasons for the failure in policing in colonial Burma.¹³

To reiterate the point, Sir Herbert, who spent more than three decades in Burma, described Burmans as a people who were easily driven to vices such as gambling, opium, and liquor, and 'by temperament he lacks restraint, doing nothing without overdoing it.'¹⁴ They were a 'guileless' race with 'kindness, compassion and generous hospitality as their virtues.' But they were also a race which bred criminals. In the words of Sir Herbert:

They produce dacoits who perpetrate unspeakable barbarities on old men and women. Sudden and quick in quarrel, the use of the knife is lamentably common. Gay, careless, light-hearted, with a strong if uncultured sense of humour, they can be cruel and revengeful. ... in a land flowing with milk and honey, a fair and fertile land where there are work and food enough for

¹³ From E.S. Symes, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Right Honourable Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State for India, in Despatch No.25 of 1887 from the Department of Finance and Commerce, Government of India, to the Right Honourable Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State for India, dated Calcutta, 1 February 1887, Note by Mr. G. J. S. Hodgkinson, Commissioner on special duty, 24 May 1886: IOLR/L/PJ/6/195, File 321.

¹⁴ Sir Herbert Thirkell White, *A Civil Servant in Burma*, pp. 55, 66.

everyone, I cannot understand why there should be any such sordid crimes as theft and embezzlement.¹⁵

This impression, or rather disappointment, at the behavior and poor standards of the Burman police led the British to recruit other races. Because Burmans could not be trusted and constantly failed when undertaking even rudimentary but important duties such as sentry and escort work, where they 'habitually' showed cowardice and unreliability, the British turned to Indians to guard police stations and treasuries.¹⁶ Even among more optimistic British officials, the fear and distrust for Burmans' inferior performance and greater chances for misconduct were common.

For the British to place their trust in their careless Burman subjects was quite dangerous. But to some British officials, the inefficiency of Burman police could also be attributed to the lack of funds to support training and to poor conditions and pay.¹⁷ In 1886, G. J. S. Hodgkinson, the Commissioner on special duty, argued that the inefficiency of the police

¹⁵ Ibid., p.66.

¹⁶ From C.C. Lowis, Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, to Secretary to the Government of India, No. 514-7P – 20, dated Rangoon, 15 September 1904, in Armed and Military Police as dealt with in the Report of the Police Commission, paragraphs 72 to 76, in Confidential Supplement to the Proceedings of the Government of Burma in the Police Department [Police Proceedings] for the month of September 1904: IOLR/P/6739.

¹⁷ Despatch No.25 of 1887 from the Department of Finance and Commerce, Government of India, to the Right Honourable Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State for India, dated Calcutta, 1 February 1887, Note by Mr. G. J. S. Hodgkinson, Commissioner on special duty, 24 May 1886.

force did not arise simply from the fact that the Burmans were scoundrels but also because the police, as a whole, were understaffed and poorly paid.¹⁸ But even Hodgkinson and Sir Herbert, who were more positive towards the Burman police, admitted that Burmans were truly a race of 'joyous' and 'light-hearted people', and did not propose to increase the number of Burmans in the force at this time – the late 1880s. Even though the British prejudices against Burman constables were demonstrably not justified,¹⁹ senior officials held to the belief that the government should look for alternatives – to recruit as many police from within the martial races in India.

At the annexation of Upper Burma, Indian constables accounted for just one third of the entire police force. In the newly annexed Upper Burma, however, the British recruited a much greater number of Indian police, partly to replace the costly military sepoy. At the beginning of 1887, for example, out of 8,939 police officers and men in Upper Burma, around 4,500 were Indians. During 1886-1887, it was proposed to recruit another 4,000 Indian constables and 520 officers, drawn mainly from the Bengal and Bombay infantry, for Upper Burma.²⁰ The model of drawing mainly Indians into the police force was also needed in Lower Burma in the same period. The Indians were commonly armed with more advanced weapons such as sniders, compared to the muzzle-loading guns or simply batons issued to

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sir Herbert Thirkell White, *A Civil Servant in Burma*, pp. 57-59.

²⁰ Note by Mr. G. J. S. Hodgkinson, Commissioner on special duty, 24 May 1886.

the Burmans, and were trained as special paramilitary troops to deal with the most violent criminals.²¹ Often, Indian and Karen militia were employed as 'punitive police' in rural Burmese communities, usually in more disturbed districts including the notorious Tharrawaddy District, to furnish guards, to track down dacoits, as well as to clear swamps covered in *kaing*-grass in which dacoits were believed to hide. The cost of maintaining these punitive battalions was borne by the village whenever a village was found guilty of failing to assist the police in catching criminals.²²

But even if the British preferred Indian over Burman police, due to the latter's alleged weakness and lack of discipline, it was sometimes admitted that Indians were not entirely suitable for all kinds of policing work, particularly where it required knowledge of Burmese and of local customs. Across vast tracts of the country, a small number of Indians, usually around five per post, were placed in the police stations and outposts to guard prisoners and to protect the guard-house, while Burman police were in charge of receiving reports, getting intelligence information, detecting crime and arresting criminals and bad characters. The co-existence of Indians and Burmans in small police stations during the late 1880s generated much criticism that the arduous work undertaken by the Indians

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Report on Violent Crime in Lower Burma during the 1st Quarter of 1888, by the Inspector-General of Police, with the Orders of the Chief Commissioner thereon*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1888: NADM, 4/1 (22), R. 87 1318; Measures for restoring Order in the Tharrawaddy District, in Index No. 12, BBHP of February 1888: IOLR/P/3117.

did not allow them time for drill and extra training, and consequently they had often become 'an undisciplined rabble.'²³

Other criticisms of the Indians recruited into the Burma police included the argument that despite their military training in India and their naturally finer physique, Indian police in Burma were recruited from among the lower classes and castes of Indians. As once pointed out by an anonymous Chief Commissioner's wife, 'other Provinces [in India] sent their worst men to Burma.'²⁴ Others claimed that the Burma police consisted 'to a great extent of men picked up from the Rangoon and other bazaars, cow-keepers, sweet-meat-sellers, and coolies from various provinces [of India].'²⁵ Furthermore, the Indians were not familiar with the Burmese population, whom they would be called upon to control. This is clearly seen from the use of Urdu as the *lingua franca* by officers and subordinate sepoy of the Indian Army serving in Burma: and, of course, there was little possibility that these Indians would learn Burmese. A number of the British police officers serving in Burma were experienced officers with a military background in India, and therefore, quite naturally, training and day-to-day interaction between British police officers and the subordinate Indian

²³ From the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Commissioner of Divisions, No. 209106P, dated 18 October 1887, in Re-organisation of the Police Force in Lower Burma, in *BBHP* of October 1887: IOLR/P/2338.

²⁴ Sir Herbert Thirkell White, *A Civil Servant in Burma*, p. 7.

²⁵ From the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department – No. 186-6D, dated 6 May 1887, Proposed Military Police Act for Lower Burma, in Index No. 8, *BBHP* of March 1887: IOLR/P/2882.

constables followed British-Indian procedures. In other words, there was little attempt on the part of British and Indian police to familiarize themselves with their indigenous recruits.

The *Burma Police Manual*, as well as legal handbooks, was published in English, Burmese, and at least one Indian language, Hindustani or Urdu. By the end of British rule, all Burmese police officers were anticipated to be able to speak English fluently and possess a good command of Hindustani.²⁶ Burmese recruits also attended Burmese language examinations throughout the year. The Burmese recruits into lower ranks were not required to learn either English or an Indian language, although many understood some English and Urdu, the words commonly used in the police and the army. In other words, there was no attempt to remove the cultural, linguistic, or racial barriers between the races in the Burma Police. This became a crucial divide that constantly detached the Burman constables from the rest of the Burma police force, making them feel apparently inferior to their Indian counterparts. The divide arose from the colonial classification of each race as being suited to a particular aspect of police work, which created little interaction between the Indian and Burmese in the force – or even between a Hindu and a Muslim Indian member of the force.

In order to maintain a large and complex police force divided on racial grounds, perhaps it made sense to discourage racial interaction. Indians were not to be employed in Burmese units, or Burmese in Indian. And this

²⁶ U Khin Maung Maung, B.P. (Class I), Commissioner of Police (Retired), interview, Rangoon, 7 January 2009.

partly explains the clear-cut separation between the civil police and military police forces and their functions. At an early point, Sir Charles Crosthwaite, the Chief Commissioner, 1883-1886 and 1887-1890, who fully acknowledged the necessity to employ military police as a separate force and to make a clear demarcation between Indian and Burman police forces, proposed that the military police should ideally be composed of half Indians and half indigenous races. Military officers, most of whom had previously served in India, would be responsible for training and discipline, while the local civil police officers would be in charge of the administrative work.²⁷

The question might be asked as to why the British colonial administration in Burma sought to recruit police officers and constables from India despite the high cost. In addition, there were often difficulties in recruitment due to economic circumstances, for example government budget cuts and natural disasters in the main recruiting areas. That the British continued to recruit in India reflected mainly the long-held colonial view of the efficiency of the martial races of India, even though that view undermined the stability and performance of the Burma police – constantly undermining the role played by the Burman police subordinates. That prejudice against the Burman in the public services, including the police and the army, was later used by Burmese nationalists since the 1930s to attack British colonial policy in Burma which essentially, it was argued, detached Burmans from all branches of the colonial administration. But to understand the British conviction that the Indians would be superior police

²⁷ Sir Charles Crosthwaite, *The Pacification of Burma*, p. 16.

in Burma, superior to the Burman recruit, it is important to explore briefly the colonial construct of the martial race.

Imagining 'martial races' in colonial Burma

The concept of the martial races emerged in British India in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. It was rapidly assimilated into the imperial military culture in India, in the British Empire, and probably in Britain as well. The martial races ideology, as explained by Heather Streets, was 'the belief that some groups of men are biologically or culturally predisposed to the arts of war.'²⁸ In other words, it was the belief that certain races were simply born warriors, ultra-masculine and hence martially superior to others: and it was an attempt to categorize the diverse racial composition of the Indian population on that basis. This ideology was later reinforced by a series of 'nostalgic' memoirs and diaries, retelling tales of adventure among warlike peoples in wild parts of the empire, and in military recruitment handbooks.²⁹ At the same time, the eagerness with which certain racial communities joined the army or police was influenced not by inherent martial qualities but principally by mundane economic circumstances, the

²⁸ Heather Streets, *Martial Races: the Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 1.

²⁹ Quoted from Des Chene, 'Language and practice in the colonial Indian Army,' p. 4: in Heather Streets, *Martial Races*, p. 3.

need to secure higher and regular pay, regardless of caste, colour, or religious distinction.³⁰

The British did not recruit for Burma high-caste Indian soldiers and police constables, as they had in the heyday of the East India Company, when most recruits were high-caste Hindus, such as the Rajputs, who were believed by the company's recruiting officers to possess a special 'martial spirit.'³¹ Most recruits for the Burma police were middle-caste or lower agriculturalists.³²

It should be noted that the concept of a special masculinity, and in particular fighting qualities, in certain races was not created in British India. After all, the English had long regarded the Scottish Highland soldiers as being particularly martial, not least from the time they had served in the British Army in the Seven Years War (1753-64).³³ But the Mutiny of 1857 strengthened the view in India that the different races there possessed to different degrees a fighting ability and spirit, not least because some fought side-by-side with the British while other races rebelled against

³⁰ Philip Constable, 'The marginalization of a Dalit martial race in late nineteenth – and early twentieth-century Western India,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, 60 (2001), pp. 440-42.

³¹ Ibid, p. 441.

³² David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: the Indian Army, 1860-1940*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994, p. 234.

³³ Timothy H. Parsons, "'Wakamba Warriors are soldiers of the Queen": the evolution of the Kamba as a martial race, 1890-1970,' *Ethnohistory*, 46, 4, 1999, p. 672.

them. After the Mutiny, the British more clearly identified the manly and brave martial races. And in contrast, the high-caste Hindus from northern India, prominent in the Mutiny, despite being 'the largest, handsomest, and cleanest looking men', were seen as 'inherently cowardly, feminine and racially unfit'.³⁴ It should be noted that the concept of martial races was also employed in British colonies in other parts of the world, beyond India and Burma.

Such handbooks on recruitment into the army and police in India indicated that the following qualities were required: 'self-sufficiency, physical and moral resilience, orderliness and hard work, fighting tenacity, and above all, a sense of courage and loyalty.'³⁵ It might be noted that some famously warlike and muscular tribes were not included in the martial races that were recruited. The tall and strong Maasai in Africa, for instance, were not recruited into the British army because their pastoral traditions and subsistence living were hardly interrupted by colonial rule.³⁶ Timothy Parsons has pointed out that the extent to which a race was 'martialized' depended also upon economic circumstances.

³⁴ Heather Streets, *Martial Races*, p. 8; see also Madan Paul Singh, *Indian Army Under the East India Company*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1976, p. 157, and T. A. Heathcote, *The Indian Army: The Garrison of British Imperial India, 1822-1922*. London: Hippocrene, 1974.

³⁵ Philip Constable, 'The marginalization of a Dalit martial race in late nineteenth – and early twentieth-century Western India,' p. 439.

³⁶ Timothy H. Parsons, "'Wakamba Warriors are soldiers of the Queen",' p. 679.

In Africa, for example, it was widely accepted that the Kamba were a strong martial race, while neighbouring races like the Kikuyu and the Maasai were never regarded as martial in that sense. Parsons argued that this was because both the Maasai and the Kikuyu were comfortable in their subsistence living, and were better off by remaining in agriculture. In other words, certain poverty-stricken peoples saw military service as an attractive option.³⁷ Economic factors, including the consequences of natural disasters, played an important role in drawing desperate men of good physique into the army and the police. But great physical strength was no guarantee of the men's loyalty: and consequently, there were 'blacklisted' races which were recruited only when absolutely necessary. The Burmans were in this category. A martial race was not only a matter of physique, fighting skills and the demonstration of loyalty. What really mattered was subservience and acceptance of British supremacy and, to a degree, a social recognition of Western tradition, including Christianity.

If ordinary Buddhist Burmans were a race of dacoits, bandits, or rebels, the other races residing in Burma, for example the Karens, were seen as more honest and trustworthy.³⁸ It was therefore tempting for some military officers to compare the Karens with other martial races with which they were familiar. In the view of Lieutenant-Colonel P.J. Maitland, the Officiating Deputy Secretary to the Government of India (Military Department), the Karens could be favourably compared with the well-

³⁷ Ibid, p. 674.

³⁸ Marquis of Dalhousie, *The Dalhousie-Phayre Correspondence, 1852-1856*, edited by D.G.E. Hall. London: Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 10.

acclaimed Gurkhas: he pointed out that Karens 'much resemble Gurkhas in the general appearance, and give good promise of becoming useful soldiers, especially for purposes of reconnaissance, outpost duty, and tracking a retreating enemy.'³⁹ Their ability to handle the fever-ridden climate of the lower hills, in the Toungoo Hill Tracts, suggested that they could supplement or even replace the Indian and British troops which had been exposed to deadly diseases for most of the year. Although the Karens had a reputation for efficiency and resistance to disease, and the fact that they could 'eat anything', their geographical inaccessibility, and hence the additional costs of recruitment, initially limited the number of Karens in the Burma police. It was only from the beginning of the 20th century that, as the superiority of the 'stolid and stocky' Karens, as well as their loyalty and increased mobility became well established in British eyes, the proportion of Karen recruited into the police increased markedly.

Through further field studies and further ethnological work, British officials created a categorization of races in Burma. The production of now classic books on the major races in Burma increased considerably, as a result of the work of missionaries, travelers and military surveyors, or simply through personal reminiscences and the fascination on the part of British officials with the indigenous races. To those who came to know the ethnic minorities well, there seemed to be some kind of special spiritual bond or a sense of emotional attachment. H.N.C. Stevenson, a former

³⁹ Endorsement by Lieutenant-Colonel P.J. Maitland, Officiating Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Military Department – No. 995B, dated 16 March 1892, in *Employment of Karens as Military Police*, in Index No. 1, *BBHP* of April 1892: IOLR/P/4038.

member of the Burma Frontier Service, for instance, when referring to the Karens, noted:

one of the strongest general characteristics of these tribes is their ability to inspire in those who know them well an affection which goes far beyond the usual ties binding a civil servant to the people he serves. This is largely due to the fact that the highlanders themselves offer a loyalty to the British Government and its officers which commands a like respect.⁴⁰

This growth in knowledge coincided with the increased integration of minorities into many branches of government service, including the police department. It is not surprising that the martial qualities of these ethnic minorities were often compared with those of the martial races from India, thus integrating these minorities into the British Indian concept of race and ethnicity. But the circumstances of Burma, with increasing crime rates from the 1880s, did not produce strong recruitment among the ideal martial races. In reality, the police service in Burma was not popular with recruits from India, not least because wages in other sectors were far higher. In 1893, the lowest-class constable in Lower Burma received only 9 rupees a month, while most coolies received at least 15 rupees.⁴¹ Thus there were difficulties in obtaining suitable Indians: and to this must be added the common British distrust of Burman recruits and the inadequate number of Burma's frontier minorities to meet the fast-growing demand from the

⁴⁰ H.N.C. Stevenson, *The Hills Peoples of Burma*. London: Longmans, Green, 1944, pp. 21-2.

⁴¹ *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1893*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1894, p. 2.

police department from the late 1880s. The discussion now turns to the actual racial composition of colonial Burma's police.

Dealing with race and racial statistics

An American Baptist missionary wrote in 1893: '... there is no country in the world whose people are more varied in race, language, and customs than Burma.'⁴² Thirty years later, Major Enriquez reiterated this: 'In no other area are the races so diverse, or the languages and dialects so numerous as in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula.'⁴³ Each of the main ethnic groups in Burma — Burmans, Shans, Karens, Chins, Kachins, Mons and Karennis (also known as Red Karens or Kayah) — provided recruits for the Burma police.

The recruitment of the different ethnic groups within Burma reflected not simply colonial assessments of the physique and character of the group but also an assessment of local economic, political, and social conditions. Enriquez explained:

... the Sawbwas, or princes, of the Shan States are autocrats. Amongst the Burmese [Burmans], Government officials have large influence; whereas, with Karens, power lies with pastors, missionaries, and elders. We must deal with all levels of understanding, with recruits who calculate their pensions, and with others who only consider the immediate effect of

⁴² E.F. Merriam, *Races of Burma*. Boston: American Baptist Missionary Union, 1893, 3rd ed., p. 4.

⁴³ Major C.M. Enriquez, *Races of Burma*, p. xiii.

soldiering on their pigs: and to whom the conditions of service are conveyed in parables.⁴⁴

In Burma, most recruits came from among the Burman population. As mentioned earlier, the recruitment of Indians into the Burma police was never consistent, either in terms of the numbers involved or the quality of the recruits. The first statistics on the racial composition of the Burma police were collected only in 1872. Of course they excluded Upper Burma which in fact was not integrated statistically into the annual report of the police of Burma until 1894, almost 9 years after the British conquest. By 1887, the number of Indian police officers and constables in Burma began to outnumber the total of Burmese police: and shortly thereafter, the number of Indian police grew to almost 19,000, while the number of Burman civil police constables remained at around 11,000 throughout the 1890s and 1910s.⁴⁵ In the 1930s, Indians accounted for 30 percent of all subordinate officers in the colonial government in Burma.⁴⁶

Towards the end of the 19th century, more individuals from the minority communities were drawn into the police force. These were peoples previously seen as wild and barbaric by early colonial officers and

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 1.

⁴⁵ See Table 1 below.

⁴⁶ Nalini Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma : the Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community*. London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, London, 1971, p. 38.

European travelers. The Chins, Kachins, Mros,⁴⁷ and Kwemis,⁴⁸ for instance, were recruited from 1892 onwards.⁴⁹ The number of Burman recruits remained consistent at around 3,000 to 4,000. The Karens numbered between three and five hundred from 1872 to 1897. From 1900 to 1910, the police statistics no longer gave the racial breakdown but put the recruits into broad religious groups, for example, Buddhists, *nat*-worshippers (animists) and Mahomedans (Muslims).

In these decades, the recruitment of Indians into the police should be seen in the context of the great expansion in Burma's economy, and the near-insatiable demand for labour which that created. By the beginning of the 20th century, Rangoon was a *kala* (Indian) city: most street signs were written in three languages, namely Burmese, Hindustani, and English. The Indian population in the entire province exceeded one million for the first time.⁵⁰ The increase in the Indian element in the police paralleled the rapid

⁴⁷ The Mros were identified as a sub-group of Chin hill people living in the vicinity of the Arakan Hill Tracts, more specifically in the following towns: Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun and Myohaung. Major C.M. Enriquez, *The Races of Burma*. Bombay: G. Claridge & Co. Ltd., 1924, pp. 37-8.

⁴⁸ Like the Mros, the Kwemis (also spelled Kamis) are categorized as a Chin ethnic group – also referred to as the Central Chin – residing in the Arakan Hill Tracts and Pakkokku Chin Hills, *Ibid*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1892*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1893.

⁵⁰ Nalini Chakravarti, *The Indian Minority in Burma*, pp. 46-47, 15.

rise in Indian labour in agriculture and industry and in the government services generally towards the end of the 19th century. In 1872, there were only 1,427 Indian police in the civil police, compared to 4,235 Burmans. The rapid growth of the province, economically and administratively, and the increase in crime necessitated the recruitment of many more Indians.

Tables 1 and 2 map out the ethnic composition of the Burma civil police from 1872 to 1910. Then, Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 illustrate the distribution of Indian races in the military police from 1888 to 1905.

Table 1: Racial Composition of the Burma Police, 1872-1897

Year	Officers										Men										Total
	Christians	Mahomedans	Hindus	Burmans	Karens	Shans	Khyins	Karenis	Taungthlus	Christians	Mahomedans	Hindus	Burmans	Karens	Shans	Khyins	Karenis	Taungthlus	Others*		
1872	66	51	19	378	12	-	6	1	3	14	763	594	3,857	293	85	124	57	33	-	6,356	
1873	70	47	30	372	16	-	2	1	4	27	780	598	3,888	291	103	84	59	37	-	6,409	
1874	71	42	31	384	17	-	2	1	3	12	721	655	4,028	315	88	79	49	46	-	6,544	
1875	77	42	33	394	20	-	2	1	3	8	662	642	4,105	436	75	84	53	50	-	6,687	
1876	78	42	29	412	17	1	2	2	4	14	706	733	4,062	440	82	78	54	41	-	6,797	
1877	75	47	28	418	15	3	1	4	2	9	709	768	4,029	373	81	86	59	34	-	6,741	
1878	69	51	21	426	23	4	1	4	2	15	713	817	4,014	412	103	86	49	26	-	6,836	
1879	73	49	30	433	22	6	1	4	2	17	690	960	413	387	134	97	62	29	-	7,127	
1880	72	51	24	436	21	5	1	3	2	12	963	853	3,959	415	120	105	49	34	-	7,125	
1881	72	49	24	444	22	8	1	3	2	9	886	997	3,806	400	132	106	52	24	-	7,047	
1882	65	50	31	463	33	4	2	1	2	6	842	896	3,767	409	92	105	33	24	-	6,668	
1883	79	57	33	507	27	4	3	-	-	5	870	1,126	4,104	357	57	101	19	15	-	7,364	
1884	79	53	26	489	32	5	3	1	3	17	821	1,106	3,866	350	68	94	69	18	-	7,100	
1885	77	51	29	498	30	7	5	3	4	20	828	1,162	3,856	362	87	83	32	26	-	7,160	
1886	115	50	44	539	56	7	5	2	5	17	1,029	1,982	2,896	537	164	71	25	25	-	7,569	
1887	112	49	112	555	51	7	5	2	17	62	987	3,278	2,951	528	118	76	30	33	-	8,973	
1888	98	31	53	583	34	7	5	1	3	27	958	2,062	2,985	553	55	131	31	35	-	7,652	
1889	209	103	202	1,218	36	16	13	4	3	17	900	2,166	8,360	596	499	275	35	57	-	14,737	
1890	110	24	69	612	34	6	4	2	3	15	783	2,256	3,395	476	77	93	14	13	-	7,986	
1891	113	28	71	603	50	8	5	1	3	11	699	2,336	3,458	474	59	78	9	11	-	8,017	
1892	118	21	46	547	27	4	6	2	1	9	281	624	2,865	353	41	10	3	2	98	5,059	
1893	129	21	14	703	17	6	-	1	1	32	347	654	3,572	500	61	-	5	2	153	6,219	
1895†	99	12	5	523	-	12	8	1	-	8	197	165	4,988	19	338	80	56	-	89	6,602	
1896	122	31	21	699	14	8	-	1	1	85	379	651	3,823	260	94	-	4	6	346	6,545	
1897	239	41	25							89	598	754		9,298 Buddhist and 379 Nat-worshippers						N/A	12,929

Source – *Annual Report of the Administration of the Police in Burma* [title varies], 1872-1897

Notes –

*Others' include Kwemis (Kamis or Kwemès), Chins, Chaungthas, Mros, Arakanese, Talaing (Mons), Chins (natural worshippers), Kachins, Manipuris, Shan Burmans, Shan-Kachins, Jews, Rajlumsees, and Chinese

+ No figures for 1894

Table 2: Racial Composition of the Burma Police Force, 1898-1910

Year	Officers												Men										Total		
	Christians	Mahomedans	Brahmins	Rajputs	Gurkhas	Sikhs	Arakanese	Chins	Jews	Other Hindus	Nat-worshippers	Buddhists	Christians	Mahomedans	Brahmins	Rajputs	Gurkhas	Sikhs	Manipuris	Punjabis	Other Hindus	Buddhists		Nat-worshippers	
1898	232	40	4	3	1	4	28	2	1	21	26	1,331	123	645	80	21	21	94	16	38	671	9,294	340	13,036	
1899	214	26	5	1	1	2	-	-	1	9	10	1,346	89	440	80	37	34	132	14	-	307	9,186	383	12,317	
1900	206	35	4	1	1	2	-	-	1	10	9	1,351	112	512	80	24	29	153	14	-	318	9,219	402	12,483	
1901	Figures not available																								
1905	189	30	4	1	1	11	N/A	N/A	N/A	9	9	1,461	73	627	108	11	26	252	N/A	N/A	527	9,303	297	12,942	
1910	203	22	9	1	1	12	-	-	-	11	9	1,065	83	981	405	55	61	400	-	-	293	10,262	377	14,326*	

Source – *Annual Report of the Administration of the Police in Burma* [title varies], 1898-191

Note – *Including 59 Chatri and 4 Gwala

Table 3.1: Indian Races in the Burma Military Police Force, 1888-1905

Year	Bengal										North-East Frontier			Madras			Bombay				Total			
	Mahomedans		Hindus																					
	Hindustanis	Punjabis	Afghans and Pathans	Sikhs	Dogras	Rajputs	Jats	Brahmins	Gurhwalis	Other	Gurkhas	Limbus and Rais	Cacharis and Assamese	Other	Mahomedans	Telugus	Tamils	Other	Mahomedans	Mahrattas		Other		
1888*	7,766	3,546	-	3,937	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15,249	
1889	6,407	4,181	-	4,743	-	-	-	-	-	-	**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15,311	
1890	730	3,086	430	4,406	288	-	-	-	-	4,318*	1,287	-	-	583	4	4	-	-	-	32	120	-	104	15,425
1891	Figures not available																							
1892	454	2,602	311	3,860	212	1,071	640	-	-	1,410	1,365	271	287	164	6	-	-	-	-	24	100	-	21	13,006
1893	457	2,134	375	3,426	199	794	491	-	-	1,421	1,328	399	251	247	1	-	-	-	-	23	14	4	11	11,558
1894	466	2,085	370	3,385	175	987	525	-	464	881	1,332	703	223	24	1	1	-	-	1	20	9	2	39	11,693
1895	Figures identical to those of 1894																							
1896	444	2,031	303	3,125	179	854	438	657	425	323	1,462	770	198	32	-	1	-	-	-	23	8	2	-	11,275
1897	683	2,225	190	4,154	180	1,035	424	932	393	676	1,616	894	194	159	1	1	-	-	1	25	121	7	-	13,911
1898	684	2,413	171	3,978	165	1,006	418	889	433	520	1,557	1,014	177	93	1	-	-	-	1	24	110	7	-	13,661
1899	688	2,449	139	4,012	165	981	411	888	530	494	1,423	1,109	155	105	1	1	-	-	23	106	8	-	13,688	
1900	680	2,509	98	4,059	166	956	396	923	550	442	1,430	1,173	141	98	7	1	-	-	1	19	94	6	-	13,749
1901	772	2,475	126	4,248	162	983	349	908	634	448	1,695	1,224	117	91	1	1	-	-	1	15	89	6	-	14,345
1902	852	2,468	138	4,166	166	1,030	279	851	534	483	1,325	1,485	133	128	-	1	-	-	1	12	85	4	-	14,241
1903	Figures not available																							
1904	Figures not available																							
1905	1,166	2,375	115	4,144	138	1,381	240	853	580	329	1,267	1,652	115	217	-	1	-	-	1	6	99	3	-	14,682

Source – Annual Report of the Administration of the Police in Burma [title varies], 1895-1905

Notes –

* The figures for 1888 to 1896 cover Upper Burma only

** Figures for Gurkhas and other hillmen are unknown but an important remark about these peoples should be noted: ‘The experience of the first three years had proved that Punjabis and hillmen in many respects [were] better suited for the arduous work in Upper Burma than Hindustanis from the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, and the tendency has therefore been to replace the latter by the former so far as possible’¹

\$ Panjabis, 213, and Hindustani Hindus, 4,105

‡ 430 of whom were Pathans

Table 3.2: Indian Races in the Burma Military Police, 1910-1925

Year	Officers								Men							Total		
	Hindus						Other Religions		Christians	Mahomedans	Brahmans	Rajputs	Gurkhas	Sikhs	Other Hindus		Buddhists	Brahmans
1910	-	90	27	26	77	105	34	27	2	6	3,668	982	1,395	3,004	1,260	982	15,473	
1915	141	2,139	35	3,105	344	1,501	172	1,101	443	38	2,138	1,631	28	-	-	-	16,070*	
1921	742	1,283	6	674	299	1,512	101	1,118	1,064	280	3,401	1,777	29	-	-	-	15,841**	
1925	279	1,457	-	1,131	189	619	50	445	873	2,841	-	-	-	-	-	-	10,216***	

Source – *Annual Report of the Administration of the Police in Burma* [title varies], 1895-1905

Notes -

*Other racial categories were added to this year's figures: 96 Bombay Marattas, 51 Bombay Shans, 2 Christians, 1 Jew, 615 Karens, 113 Various, 764 Kachins, and 52 Kamaoris

**This overall figure also includes the numbers of police constables as follows: 82 Bombay Marattas, 3 Christians, 773 Karens, 564 Kachins, 620 Kamaoris, 190 Ahires from the North-East Frontier, 152 Gour Brahmins from Madras, 1 Burman, and 170 Chins

*** This overall figure includes the numbers of police constables as follows: 40 Bombay Marattas, 380 Karens, 326 Kachins, 639 Kamaoris, 25 Ahires from the North-East Frontier, 129 Gaur Brahmins from Madras, 223 Chins, 95 Punjabi Hindus from the North-East Frontier, and 91 Bhuminars from the North-East Frontier

Table 3.3: Indian races in the Burma Military Police, 1929-1938

Year	Mahomedans		Hindus							Total															
	Hindustanis	Punjabis	Dogras Rajputs	Sikhs	Dogras Brahmins	Rajputs	Jats	Brahmins	Gurhwalis Rajputs		Other Hindus														
1929	219	1,631	109	1,388	105	545	52	432	564	96	2,986	106	110	558	168	-	-	-	-	229	112	413	22	325	10,170
1934	143	1,730	-	1,587	-	129	79	358*	488	-	3,114	103	-	-	63	3	-	-	-	399	577	-	-	454	11,961**
1935	456	1,939	138	1,891	-	-	-	-	501	-	3,137	-	-	727	-	-	-	-	-	433	706	997	-	492	12,401***
1936	145	1,949	153	1,960	-	-	-	-	472	-	2,949	-	-	797	-	-	-	-	-	464	711	964	-	512	12,076****
1938	53	537	-	456	-	-	-	-	-	-	991	-	-	596	-	-	-	-	-	-	705	963	-	-	4,301

Sources – *Annual Report of the Administration of the Police in Burma* [title varies], 1929-1938

Notes –

*Brahmins and Rajputs

** This figure includes new racial categories and figures: 80 Ahirs, 55 Punjabi Hindus, 726 Kumaoris, 676 Burman Gurkhas, 85 Shans, and 170 Mixed Classes

It is essential to point out that it is difficult, if not impossible, to create one single table to illustrate the racial composition of the Burma police for the whole period of British rule. The statistics on the racial composition of the Burma Police under the colonial regime are severely fractured. However, it is clear that Burmans numerically dominated the police force. Initially, their numbers remained between 2,000 and 4,000, with exceptions for the years 1879 and 1889, where the figure is unusually low, at 413, or exceptionally high, at 8,360. No explanation has been provided in the official record for the low number of Burman police in 1879. But the high proportion of Burmans (both officers and men) in 1889 might be attributed to the serious outbreak of crime following the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886, and the establishment of the Military Police in that period. The strength of the Burman police in 1889 might thus reflect the British fear of serious disorder.

It is important to emphasize that the frequent re-categorization of the official statistics for the racial composition of the police makes it extremely difficult for the historian to establish an accurate, long-term analysis. From 1867 to 1891 the ethnic categories remained unchanged. Then from 1892 to 1897 new categories were added, implying some sub-division of the earlier categories. From 1898 to 1901 that structure was abandoned, replaced with religious categories for the Burmese but maintaining a racial composition for the Indian recruits. The peoples of Burma were categorized into Buddhists and *nat*-worshippers, alongside Christians, Muslim Brahmins, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Manipuris, and Punjabis. This structure, in turn, disappeared from 1910.

Starting in the early 1890, the police records placed Indian recruits into 5 major groups: Mohamedans, Hindus, North-East Frontier, Madras, and Bombay. Other military police recruits included Christians, Jews, Karens, Kachins, and a handful of Punjabi Hindus. The Sikhs, included as Hindu, were the largest Indian group, at 4,406 in 1890. Then there were the Mahomedan Punjabis at 3,086, the Gurkhas from Gurkha Proper (1,287), and Mahomedan Hindustani (730). In later years, the recording of Indian recruits by region of origin was abolished: now the emphasis focused on religion and caste. But the records for the military police from 1910 were extremely confusing. Muslims, for example, were not included in the religion or castes list for the subordinate police. Brahmans and Rajputs were not included among 'Other Hindus'. Buddhists, which presumably included the Burmans, accounted for only 1,260 men in 1910.

In the same year, out of the total of 388 military officers, 105 were Sikhs and 90 were Muslims. There was virtually no Christian military officer. But by 1915, the number of Christian officers and men had risen to 1,141 but still just half the number of Sikh officers and men. Following the First World War, the number of Muslims in the Burma military police fell, from 2,239 in 1915 to 1,283 in 1921. But there was increased recruitment of Kamaoris, Gurhwalis, Brahmins, Dogras, Karens, and Kachins, while the number of Sikhs and Mahomedan Punjabis fell by half. Most of the military police in this period, therefore, were not Sikhs and Rajputs but Gurkhas.

Thus although there are serious difficulties in establishing and interpreting the statistical evidence on the racial composition of the police in colonial Burma, a few core observations can be made. The first observation is that

European officers remained a significant element and, of course, more important an influence than the crude numbers might suggest. Second, towards the close of the 19th century, there was substantial promotion of both Indian and Burmese rank-and-file men into the ranks of officers. One important consequence of this promotion of better trained and more experienced Burmese was that the authorities became less concerned over the quality of the new recruits — with better leadership the quality of the rank-and-file was of less significance — and this opened up the opportunity to recruit more actively within Burma itself rather than among the ‘more suitable’ races of India. And the third observation is that the number of Indians in the Burma police appears to have fluctuated more widely over this period than the numbers for other racial groups, Europeans and Burmese. This suggests that the Indians were used essentially as a reserve, to top up the numbers during periods of crisis in the maintenance of order in colonial Burma.

The statistics after 1892, however, raise several particularly difficult issues. The British now began to include new racial categories, although few attempts were made to integrate the ethnic minorities into the police in a systematic fashion. The numerically most important new ethnic group from the last decade of the 19th century was the Chin. The British saw the Chins’ fighting quality for themselves during the first Chin Expedition between 1888 and 1889. The second and third most important new recruits, in numerical terms, were the Kwemis (Kamis) and the Chaungthas, the latter also belonging to the Chin group. The Chins proved to be competent fighters, and to a certain extent managed to secure the trust and confidence of the British. Further ethnic minorities were added to the police in the

following years. In 1895, for instance, Shan-Burmans were found at police recruiting depots, 36 out of the 89 new ethnic recruits. But only 12 Chins enlisted in the same year.

Tables 3.1 to 3.3 show a major increase in the number of Indian constables in the Burma police, from approximately 2,000 in the mid-1880s, though for Lower Burma only, to some 20,000 at the end of the decade. As mentioned earlier, it seems evident that the large-scale recruitment in India was a response to the serious unrest that took hold in Burma in the years following the final annexation in 1885. As the unrest died down and the threat of rebellion receded, the number of Indian constables fell away. In 1905, the last year for which we have firm figures for the Indian police in Burma, they totaled 14,682.

Interestingly, in the short period from the second half of the 1880s to the beginning of the 1900s, the British recorded the place of origin and religion of the Indian police they recruited. Again as can be seen from Tables 3.1 to 3.3, the majority of the Indians recruited into the Burma Police in this period were Sikhs, Muslim Punjabis, and Gurkhas. The first two groups were recruited in Bengal and the latter from the North-Eastern Frontier, close to present-day Nepal. Most police were recruited by *ad hoc* committees, or British officers serving in Burma on leave in India, in different parts of India, and recruitment largely reflected well-established British categorizations of the characteristics of these peoples. Among these 'martial races', the Rajputs, Limbus and Rais, and the 'Muslims from Hindustan' were among the preferred choices. And it might be argued that the influence of the Indian element in the Burma Police was even greater

than their numbers suggest, a point that will be taken up later in this thesis. Thus although more police were recruited locally (notably Shans and the Kachins), simply because it was more administratively convenient and cheaper to recruit within Burma, the Indian presence remained immensely important.

Unlike the statistics for the civil police, those of the military police are less fractured and indeed are relatively straightforward. There are two main reasons for this. First, compared to the civil police, the military police force was a new establishment with the clear purpose of being a foreign paramilitary force initially employed as guards or as the police who actually chased after criminals. Generally speaking, the military police battalions were established to meet immediate major crises in internal security. In Burma, the military police was exclusively used during and after the insurgency of the late 1880s, particularly in areas of dense jungle, mountains, and where there had not been firm administration for some time, specifically in Upper Burma and the previously un-administered territories like the Chin Hills and the Shan Plateau. Because of the force's compact size and the fact that it had been constructed to meet the sudden eruption of violent crime, the reports and figures on the military police were far more structured. Certain levies were organized on a clear racial basis: this included Chin, Shan, and Karen levies. However, occasionally such ethnicity-based titles did not reflect the actual composition of the police battalion: Karen levies, in particular, were usually composed entirely of either Burmans or Indians, or a mixture of Burman, Indian, and Karen in

some districts.⁵¹ That said, most of the military police were Indians recruited among specific races in specific areas of India as well as Nepal. A small number of Burmans and ethnic minorities were also recruited, mainly for detective and surveillance purposes.

At times, the more constructive and efficient role of the military police battalions convinced the superintendents and inspector generals of police that the military police were far more useful than the civil police, certainly during disturbances. As one Chief Commissioner of Burma wrote: 'In Upper Burma, during the past year, the most important part of the work of the police was the destruction of organized gangs of dacoits. The military police was therefore 'the more important part of the police force.'⁵² They were mainly used as a reserve from which detachments were sent out wherever and whenever the district police were in need of semi-military assistance. For several years, the annual police reports for Lower and Upper Burma addressed the need to recruit Indians from 'fighting races' into the military police, because 'it was impossible to expect to find [in Burma] a population loyal to the new administration and ready to supply an efficient body of police for the protection of the people, and for the

⁵¹ Letters from the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Commissioner of Pegu Division – No. 311-35C, dated 12 May 1887, and from Colonel C.W. Street, Commissioner of the Pegu Division, to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, - No. 38-1, dated 6 April 1887, in Index No. 9, *BBHP* of March 1887: IOLR/P/2882.

⁵² *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1888*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1889, Resolution p. 7.

suppression and detection of crime.’⁵³ In Lower Burma, figures for the military police appeared in the police reports for the first time in 1886, only 70 officers and 1,000 men, but the foundation of a strengthened police force in Lower Burma in a period of great expansion.⁵⁴

These Indians, as argued earlier in the chapter, were clearly defined by the British as the police constables to be deployed in the event of severe disorder ‘in which courage and discipline are indispensable’.⁵⁵ The need to recruit good-quality Indians, ideally from among the martial races, to be trained to near-military standards was, until 1887, facilitated by the Military Department in India, which set up recruitment depots for the Burma police.⁵⁶ At a later point, attempts were made to transfer recruitment in India to the civil authorities by employing Burma Police officers on leave in India. This was intended to reduce costs and to remove military intervention in what was considered a civilian responsibility. The rapid expansion and settlement of the Indian element in the Burma military

⁵³ *Report on the Police Administration of Upper Burma for the Year 1887*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1888, p. 1.

⁵⁴ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1886*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1886, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1885*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1886, p. 4.

⁵⁶ From the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department – No. 186-6D, dated 6 May 1887, in Proposed Military Police Act for Lower Burma, in Index No. 8, *BBHP* of May 1887: IOLR/P/2882.

police force was attributed to the fact that the Indian recruits were imported into Burma *en masse* and that, according to the Military Police regulations, men enlisted in the military police in Upper Burma were required to serve a minimum three-year contract.⁵⁷ This may also explain why the overall numbers in the military police did not fluctuate as much as the total civilian police establishment. Even in the last year for which we have figures on race, Sikhs, Muslim Punjabis, Rajputs, Gurkhas, and the Limbus and Rais remained relatively consistent in strength, although it might be noted again that the influence of the Indian elements in the Burma Police was greater than their numbers suggest.

By comparing Tables 3.1 and 3.2, taken from the official annual reports of the Burma police, one is struck by the lack of consistency in the way in which the statistics on race/caste/religion among the military police were recorded. In the first table, the largest columns were a confusing mixture of religions (Mahomedans and Hindus), geographically-based locations (North-Eastern Frontier, Madras and Bombay), and races such as Karens and Kachins. It seems that the British put all the Indians into two categories based on their religion and place of origin because, as explained earlier, most of the recruits were drawn from recruiting depots set up in just a few areas across India. It was perhaps convenient and more accurate to record the races/castes under the place of origin, while the constables included in the first two columns of 'Mahomedans' and 'Hindus' might be either voluntary recruits or constables recruited from outside the recruiting depots.

⁵⁷ *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1894*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1895, p.12.

The religion/race categories of the military police constables were far more varied and less systematic than those of the officers. In later years, from 1915 and more apparently in 1925, the British abandoned the categorization of police officers and men according to their religion or race and replaced it with numerical notes, as seen from the notes of Table 3.2, as new races began to emerge in the recruitment list each year. Notably, the British also began to make a distinction between the races of gazetted officers and non-gazetted police constables.

It can be seen from the same table that from 1910 to 1920, among the officers and subordinates, the majority of the police in Burma were Buddhists, with perhaps a handful of animists recruited in distant parts of Upper Burma. But the numbers were almost matched by Hindus, reflecting the large Indian presence. There is then a decline in the total of both Hindus and Buddhists through to the end of the 1930s, though the decline in the number of Buddhists was sharper. An administrative fracture may explain in part the decline from the mid-1920s, for it is clear from the annual reports of the police that the data from 1925 are for the military police alone, which was significantly more racially diverse. Muslims from various parts of India also formed a significant part of the Burma Police Force, although their relative importance fell with increased recruitment of, mainly, Sikhs and Rajputs.

It is clear that race was a crucial influence on the recruitment policy of the Burma police from the late 19th century, and more so in the first decades of the 20th century. The recruitment of Indians and the Burmese minorities into the Burma police, in line with the martial races thinking in India and

the parallel quest for comparable martial races in Burma, left the Burman police officers and constables, who, in the late 19th century, still made up the majority of the civil police, vulnerable. Although Burmans, overall, formed the majority of the Burma police, they were usually unarmed, left to perform petty duties, while Indians and the minorities were allowed to carry weapons and faced the major policing challenges. Battalions or levies of military police, like the Karen and Kachin Levies, were ethnically identified and generally treated with more respect than their Burman counterparts.

The widely-perceived inefficiency of the Burman police and the increasing difficulties and costs in obtaining Indian recruits, together with the apparent reluctance of villagers to assist the police in combating crime, encouraged the British, determined to impose a measure of order on rural Burma, to seek a revitalization of the structure and responsibilities of the traditional Burmese village, at least as the new colonial administration understood it. To a degree, rural Burma was to police itself.

Re-organizing the police in the 1880s

For the British colonial administration in Burma, policing, although important from the first years of colonial rule, did not become an urgent necessity and a pivotal concern until an attempt was made to bring order to Upper Burma in the late 1880s, order in the face of an unprecedented and alarming increase in crime, particularly violent crime. The British military expeditions during the 'pacification' campaign in Upper Burma struggled to impose a measure of peace, not least because of the indifference of Burmese villagers to the suppression of crime in support of the British attempts. But even as Burma was 'pacified', the issue remained as to how order could be maintained without the expensive engagement of British-Indian troops. The response of the colonial administration was to seek to engage the commitment of rural Burma in the reporting and suppression of crime, through a revitalization of traditional Burma's village administration, as the British understood it.

In 1887, following this line of argument, district superintendents of police and deputy or assistant commissioners across British Burma were asked for their views on the current condition of policing in the province and on the increasing incidence of crime. They were also asked for their recommendations. Some 20 lengthy and detailed submissions were

returned. These were later taken as evidence by a police committee, the Police Commission, established the following year to consider the first major re-organization of the Burma police force.

An essential concern of the Police Commission was the alleged deterioration in the performance of the police and the rise in crime, especially in dacoities, over the preceding decade. The Commission's deliberations prompted a number of initiatives, including the revitalization of village administration and its policing functions, the creation of a separate military police, a redefinition of the relationship between village policing officials and local magistrates, and a re-balancing of the proportions of Indian, Burmese, and Europeans officers and men in the province's police forces.

None of these issues created more anxiety among the Burma police than the resurrection of the village police (also referred to as the 'rural police' or simply as the 'village administration'). The village police, or in fact the village institution as a whole, became crucial to the expansion of British rule in Burma in the second half of the 19th century. Sir Charles Crosthwaite, the Chief Commissioner, 1883-86 and 1887-90, once remarked that 'the Burmese administration would suffer if its village official constitution was imperiled in any way.'¹ It is perhaps sensible for this chapter to follow the Police Commission's and Sir Charles' main concern by

¹ Abstract of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor General of India, assembled for the purpose of making Laws and Regulations under the provisions of the Act of Parliament 24&25 Vic., cap.67, in Act to amend law relating to district cesses and rural police in British Burma: IOLR/L/PJ/6/7 File 348.

probing further into the thinking behind the first major police reform in Burma with the emphasis on the reform of village policing. This chapter will then seek, but in a less detailed manner, to discuss the other, related, issues that contributed to the late-1880s police reform. This will include the relationships between the police department and the other criminal and judicial branches of the government, and between the colonial police and the indigenous population at large.

Each of the problems examined by the Police Commission brought into focus the central issue facing the colonial administration as it struggled to maintain order in the first few years after the conquest of Upper Burma. The alleged inefficiency of the village administration seemed to be the most serious threat to public order because, as it was argued, dacoit gangs were being given assistance by ordinary villagers and this practice was often ignored by village headmen.² Consequently, during the late 19th century, attempts were made by the authorities to restore the traditional Burmese village leadership, which had disintegrated following the Anglo-Burmese wars and the introduction of the British Indian Police Act, 1861, essentially by reinforcing the relationship between the government and the villagers. The importance of the Burmese village administration became critical in the administration of the Burma police partly because it revealed the gravest weaknesses of late 19th century policing in Burma, the lack of public responsibility, at the village level, to resist criminals and to assist the police

² Orders issued to Thugyis by the Deputy Commissioner, Lower Chindwin (quoted from W.T. Morrison, Deputy Commissioner, Lower Chindwin, to the Commissioner of the Central Division, No. 11-3, dated 9 October 1888, in Instructions in regard to the Upper Burma Village Regulation, in Index No. 13, *BBHP* of March 1889: IOLR/P/3352.

in detecting and suppressing crime. An excerpt from an order given to *thugyis* (village headmen – sometimes known as *ywa-thugyis*) in Upper Burma summarizes the policing function expected of Burmese village leaders under British rule:

In future as soon as a dacoity occurs in a village the thugyi shall report the fact to the nearest police station without delay. He must not wait till the dacoits have left the village. It is not necessary that the thugyi should himself report the matter, but he should immediately send one or two villagers to do so. Should the thugyis fail to give prompt information, but does so only at daybreak; and should he after the dacoits have left the village fail to follow up their trick himself. He will be severely punished.³

From the end of the Second Anglo-Burmese War in the early 1850s, Burma had experienced a great leap in violent crime, mostly committed by trans-frontier dacoit bands from Upper Burma. Then following the third war in 1885, a rebellion occurred in Shwegyin District on the east bank of the Sittang River adjacent to the Siamese border. The Shwegyin rebellion was quelled in just less than one month with the aid of military troops but it inspired the emergence of a large number of in the following years.⁴ The gangs operated along the old frontier. In Thayetmyo alone, to give an example, dacoities increased from 86 cases in the previous year to 317 cases

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1886*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1887, p. 5.

in 1887.⁵ The extent of the disorder was shocking. Many villages and towns were looted and burnt; arms and ammunition were stolen from police stations and outposts; and there were a large number of police casualties. The authorities were also disturbed by the fact that the local population was utterly hopeless in giving the police assistance to suppress the disorder:

The townspeople are reported to have calmly looked on at the fighting, rendering no assistance to the police. This continual fighting could not be kept up long; the ammunition was nearly expended, the men getting done, and there was no hope of help...so it was thought best to retreat while there was some chance if doing so in safety.⁶

Although the police – mainly Indian military police – were able to suppress the larger gangs, the task of pursuing the smaller bands of dacoit, usually not more than 10 members, was painfully slow.⁷ Once the more notorious dacoit gangs were suppressed, it became apparent that crime in Burma would decrease. But even so, rural crime remained a considerable problem. There were innumerable cases of petty dacoit attacks and robberies. The

⁵ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1887*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1888, p. 8.

⁶ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1885*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1886, Appendix – Rebellion in the Shwegyin District.

⁷ Extract from the Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner, Burma, in the Judicial Department, No. 7C, 10 January 1887, in Chief Commissioner's Resolution on the Violent Crime Report for the 3rd quarter of 1886, in *BBHP* of January 1887: IOLR/P/2882.

frequency of criminal acts greatly alarmed the colonial authorities. The level of rural disorder was a considerable challenge.

The situation in many of Burma's rural districts was 'one of permanent evil character', the districts inhabited by the most notorious bandits like Bo Swe, Bo So and Ne Dun.⁸ But the gravest problem the British faced was the villagers' indifference in reporting to the authorities the locations of the gangs. Moreover the task of preserving law and order in the 1880s was very difficult when regular troops, ignorant of local languages and geography, could not be efficiently used, even when available, in the pursuit of smaller dacoit gangs. But the main shortcoming, it was argued, resided in 'the sympathy with which they appear to be regarded by the general population . . . [it] renders the task of capturing them once of great difficulty.'⁹

As noted above, the innumerable petty dacoities and gang robberies underpinned the government's assumption that the ill-defined and incompetent system of village policing, as well as the lack of collective cooperation from villagers, were the key elements in the inefficiency of policing in Burma. It would therefore be helpful to provide a detailed account of how the Burmese villages, before the British conquest, policed themselves; then, how the colonial regime came to understand the pre-colonial village system; and, finally, to take the revitalization of the village

⁸ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1887*, p. 9.

⁹ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1886*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1887, Resolution pp. 1, 5.

police as the starting point for the discussion of the Police Commission in the late 1880s.

Pre-colonial village policing

In order to understand the discussions which took place and the recommendations that emerged from them, it is essential to explore the British understandings of the ways in which Burma had been policed under the Burmese kings. However, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to provide one single, and definite, description of village policing in pre-colonial Burma, for the historical sources regarding pre-colonial policing are scanty and fractured. Historians of Konbaung Burma (1752-1885) base their judgment of socio-political conditions upon a few sources, most notably *Sit-tans*,¹⁰ *Hluttaw* (Royal Ministerial Council) records, and a limited number of European travellers' accounts. In fact, the dynastic view embedded in the records commissioned by the monarch was restricted to descriptions of central administration under the king. The supreme authority, as the 'lord of lives', as kingship was often referred to in pre-colonial mainland South East Asia, hardly stretched to ordinary villages.

But as far as we can judge, in pre-colonial Burma, selected village officials were responsible for all aspects of village administration. They acted as headman, watchman, policeman, correspondent, and as a clerk who

¹⁰ Trager and Koenig described *Sit-tans* as 'a record of an inquiry submitted to the Court by all territorial jurisdictions and crown service groups,' Frank N. Trager and William J. Koenig, *Burmese Sit-tāns 1764-1826: Records of Rural Life and Administration*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979, Glossary p. xvi.

registered births and deaths. The village officials' all-round responsibilities could be effectively discharged when the village was collective and the authority of headmen was strictly bound to their village, usually made up of perhaps 10-20 households. In other words, village administration was limited to the village at a time when social mobility and the development of transportation were in their infancy. Individuals to take on administrative responsibilities were chosen through the patriarchic and hereditary structures to safeguard the village.¹¹

It is not possible to describe every village office holder and his functions because some village officials may have been influential in one village but not have existed in the others. In addition, during the Konbaung dynasty, none of the Burmese village officials was given a sole and clearly-defined function in the detection and prevention of crime. That would come later, in the 'modern policing' of the mid-19th century.

From the mid-18th century, the centre of Burmese administration under the Konbaung dynasty was situated in the arid zone flanked by the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers in Upper Burma. Under the king, the Burmese regime exercised its power through two interwoven entities: the central administrative organ of the state, supervised by the *Hluttaw*; and the local administration in districts or towns outside the fortified royal city, administered by *wuns* (government officials) who, indirectly it seems, exerted their judicial, revenue collection, mobilization of labour, police

¹¹ See Kyaw Yin, "The Foundations of Public Administration in Burma: A Study in Social and Historical Perspectives" (PhD diss., New York University, 1963), p. 80.

control and similar functions through local *athi*¹² officials such as the *myothugyis* (an hereditary official in charge of a *myo* or a circle).¹³ Hereditary *myo-za* (appanage holder) and Crown-appointed *myo-wun* (governor of town) were also present as a symbolic institution of the larger *myos* and the guardian of the lineal tradition of the Burmese crown. Crown-appointed officials like *Myowun* (provincial governor) and *Sitke* (judicial officer in charge of police administration and military affairs, alternatively spelled *Sitkè*) were in charge of district or town affairs. In theory, they represented the King's ultimate authority, but, in reality, those officials had to rely heavily on the assistance given by local, mostly hereditary, chiefs such as the *myothugyis* who were responsible for all key aspects of the *myo*: defence, tax collection, land and revenue appraisal, distribution of labour, and policing.¹⁴

The *myothugyis* had the confidence of villagers, and the court's heavy dependence on them, although they were not officials, was evident in the

¹² In pre-colonial Burma, social stratification was broadly organized into two layers – the 'crown service' group and the *athi*. The former were government *wuns* (officials), classified as the *ahmudans* sector of the society, of different ranks including *hluttaw* ministers serving in the royal city, whereas the latter were commoners who were not specifically tied to the government. The King could, however, call for *athi*'s service for labour and during warfare. In return, they received certain rights such as land. Adoniram Judson, *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*. Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1921, p. 116.

¹³ Frank N. Trager and William J. Koenig, *Burmese Sit-tāns 1764-1826: Records of Rural Life and Administration*, Glossary p. xiii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38-39.

fact that they were allowed to raise their own regiments for the preservation of peace in their *myo*. In addition, they received royal regalia from the king. Early British settlement accounts placed the *myothugyi*s at the top of the hierarchical structure of district and town administration. Some described them as the real rulers of Burma.¹⁵ The evolving functions of *myothugyi*, as decreed by the court, made them the local police officer above the level of the village. According to royal decree, *myothugyi*s were appointed to perform the following duties: first, to recognize different classes of people in the locality; second, to punish petty crime; third, to settle all administrative affairs in the immediate circle; and, finally, to arrest criminals including dacoits and bad characters.¹⁶

Beneath the *myothugyi* lay an array of circle officials usually ordered in four departments: *tawgaung* (special district officer), *taw-ke* (also spelled *tawkè*, forests land officer), *mye-daing* (land officer), and *asiyin* (judicial officer).¹⁷ The functions of these officers greatly overlapped and until fixed emoluments and the payment of commission on tax collections was introduced during the reign of King Mindon (r. 1853-1878), the powers exercised by these crown officials over the village was said to be oppressive and highly corrupt.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ma Mya Sein, *The Administration of Burma*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 41, 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Situated at the bottom of the Burmese administrative structure were the ordinary villages. A number of villages, located in the remote countryside, were hardly accessible at all. State penetration from the heartland of the Burmese throne in Upper Burma into such villages and hamlets was unlikely, but not impossible. As long as the royal regulations regarding tax payment, tribute, and the provision of labour were followed, village life under *thugyis* was largely peaceful. Villagers enjoyed the freedom of electing their own *thugyi* whose responsibility was primarily focused on collecting taxes and agricultural produce, and on recruiting manpower for the crown, through the *myothugyi*, in times of war and hardship. Limited state intervention allowed village officials like *thugyis*, over generations, to grow both in prestige and in their close-knit relationship with their subordinates and other villagers.¹⁹ G.E. Harvey described *thugyi* in pre-colonial Burma as ‘more than functionary, he was the head of society, and he set the tone.’²⁰ The size of the village varied greatly: but pre-colonial *thugyis* could be the head of a hamlet of around 10 to 15 households or less, or the leader of a group of villages (known as *taik* or a circle of villages).

Sources describing the offices under the *thugyis* and their roles in the village are few. Father Sangermano’s late 18th- to early 19th-centuries account of the Burmese Empire, for instance, described the appointment of *myothugyi* in vivid detail but did not provide any account of the local offices under the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁰ G.E. Harvey, *British Rule in Burma*. London: Faber and Faber, 1946, p. 24.

thugyis.²¹ Likewise, the Burmese official records focused on taxes and the military manpower provided by the *myothugyis* through the *thugyis* in the village. Consequently, much of our understanding of the traditional village structure in Burma is derived from the investigations undertaken by the British after the annexation of Pegu in the early 1850s.

The British understanding of the lower strata of village administration was that assistance was given to the *thugyis* by a number of individuals whose title and function varied from village to village. But in general there were two key appointments: *gaungs* and *kyedangyis*. During the British debate on village re-organization in 1887-88, these two positions would attract greater attention than the others. Both *gaungs* and *kyedangyis* had various functions, bestowed upon them by the *thugyis*. Before the annexation of Upper Burma in 1885, *gaungs*, alternatively known as *yazawutgaungs* or *kyedangyis*, literally meaning 'the man who bore the most revenue', were ordinary villagers who assisted the *thugyi* in collecting taxes as well as in policing matters.

It is not clear how far the duties of *gaungs* differed from those of *kyedangyis* during pre-colonial times but they enjoyed much prestige and local influence under the Burmese kings. The rather obscure figures of *gaungs* and *kyedangyis* confused the colonial government a great deal. But they would soon be consolidated – their roles and functions clearly described – once the Police Act (Act V of 1861) came into use in Burma, principally by

²¹ Father Sangermano, *The Burmese Empire a hundred years ago*. London: Archibald Constable, 1893, p. 83.

detaching *thugyis* from criminal work and making them just tax officers.²² Similarly, *kyedangyis* came to be increasingly known as the village police officer who worked with the civil or military police by reporting crimes to the nearest police station or outpost, and assisting the police in resisting dacoit attacks.

At a time of rapid economic development in Lower Burma, the income from the land revenue and capitation tax were vigorously sought. As a result, *thugyi* were required by the colonial authorities to take charge of the revenue work. Other aspects of village work, following the introduction of the Police Act of 1861 in India and Burma, were transferred to other village officials. *Gaungs*, for example, came to be appointed as village policemen by the British (no longer by the *thugyis*) and they were paid, though very little.²³ To what extent local executive power, and in what aspects, should be granted to *thugyis*, and how far should the offices of *gaungs* and *kyedangyis* be maintained, would generate much debate among British police and judicial officers throughout Burma in the last two decades of the 19th century. As the *thugyi* were now involved principally in revenue matters, the question was repeatedly asked: who would become the 'backbone' of village administration and of village policing?

Before we consider the British debate on the re-organization of the police force in the late 1880s, based on the revitalization of traditional Burmese

²² Ma Mya Sein, *The Administration of Burma*, pp. 100-1.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

village policing, it is crucial to discuss how British officials – from the Chief Commissioner downwards – understood the policing of Burma's villages.

The colonial understanding of village policing

The British understanding of the Burmese structure of village policing had developed over many decades. It arose principally from a direct encounter with village life in Upper Burma, where first-hand information from village officials became an important strategic tool in pacification after 1885. Understandings developed from Upper Burma were then applied in the more densely populated and prosperous Lower Burma.

However, there was never a consensus among British officials of the precise structures of village policing or an identification of the particular village official as the backbone of village administration and policing. As noted earlier, structures and officials varied considerably in each village in Lower and Upper Burma. Moreover, the annexation of Upper Burma and the subsequent rebellion created a wave of migration into Lower Burma but also into the more prosperous districts of the Delta. These substantial movements of population substantially undermined the traditional village system. Perhaps most notably, the headman's personal influence and the principle of hereditary succession of village officials declined.

The absence of a preliminary 'knowledge' of, or a simple narrative on, the pre-colonial village system in Burma left the British to look for a model from elsewhere, from India. Consequently the British examined their long-

standing encounter with village administration in parts of India and then adjusted it with their impressions of Burmese rural society.

But the British came to realize that the Indian structures of village administration, bound closely to the land tenure system and a caste-based agrarian hierarchy, was absent in Burma. In India, since the medieval period, the ruler granted, or transferred, vast tracts of land to his 'intermediaries' or military personnel who would, for centuries, establish local influence as feudal lords, known as *jagirdars* or *zamindars* (meaning holder of the land). Their holdings, power, and influence could be inherited through the generations. Thus the second-generation *zamindar*, as the sole proprietor of the land, collected revenue and agricultural produce from his kinsmen or from landless cultivators.²⁴

During the colonial period, the British were clear that an understanding of India's rural structures was crucial to the consolidation of their rule. And they also came to understand that the feudalism of Britain and Western Europe differed considerably from the Indian systems of land ownership, patron-client relationships, and the land tenure, each of which was based on caste system. One of the first measures used by the East India Company to impose its authority on rural India was to assess the value of land and to define its owner in all cases. But land previously owned by *zamindaris* and rented to *ryots* (cultivator peasants) was increasingly transferred to the emerging class of moneylenders and traders who could afford to meet the

²⁴ Rekha Bandyopadhyay, "Land System in India: A Historical Review," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52 (1993), pp. A149-A150.

high demands of the land revenue.²⁵ Across India, even with its vast diversity of land systems, the British increasingly became familiar with rural structures: the *zamindari* system in Bengal, *ryotwari* and peasant proprietorship in Bombay and Madras, and the zealous influence of the *taluqdars* in Oudh.²⁶

In Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, since the Mughal period (1526-1857), the most prevalent form of village system was the *zamindari* system. The *zamindars* acted as intermediaries between the Mughal rulers and the rest of the population, mostly tenant farmers. With the advent of British rule, *zamindars* were transformed into functionaries between the British administration and the local population, acting as revenue-generators and as political intermediaries to preserve social order within his designated area. The importance of the *zamindars* was increased by the land development scheme employed by the East India Company, the Permanent Settlement, in the late 18th century, and specifically their role in clearing vast tracts of waste land and bringing it into cultivation by renting it to tenant cultivators.

But, crucially, a comparable traditional structure was absent in rural Burma. Specifically, the extension of the cultivated area in the second half of the 19th century was being secured not through the renting out of newly-cleared land by established rural interests, as earlier in India, but through

²⁵ Ibid., p. A151.

²⁶ B.H. Baden-Powell, "The Origin of Zamindari Estates in Bengal," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 11 (1896), pp. 42-3.

the initiative of individual cultivators, seeking to establish personal ownership and creating new settlements through that process. It followed that, for the British in Burma, the challenge was to create an effective structure of revenue collection and village policing in areas, largely frontier areas that were being newly settled. Traditional structures of local authority simply did not exist in those areas.

At the same time, among the various forms of village system the British had witnessed in India, the rural structures of the Bombay Presidency seemed to fit most closely to the demands of Burma. Unlike elsewhere in India, where the power of large feudal landowners such as the zamindars was integral to the administration of a village, most villages across Bombay Presidency were under the authority of a village police officer (known as the police *patel*), with perhaps two or more *patels* in larger villages. These police *patels* were mainly responsible for collecting taxes and for reporting crime to the colonial authorities.²⁷ This system, based on the authority of one village headman, it was claimed, had proved a great success in India.²⁸ With this principle of one headman for each village, the foundation was laid, from the 1850s, for a Burmese village administration modelled on the

²⁷ From R.A. Lamb, Deputy Commissioner, Ava, to the Commissioner of the Central Division, Upper Burma – No. 8-3, dated 1 December 1887, 'Rules to be framed in the Ava District under Section 3, Sub-section 4, of the Upper Burma Village Regulation,' in Index No. 11, *BBHP* of March 1887: IOLR/P/3117.

²⁸ Statement of objects and reasons [for the implementation of the Lower Burma Rural Police Bill], C. U. Aitchinson: IOLR/PJ/6/239 File 1754; and Draft Bill for the establishment of a system of village organization in Lower Burma, in Index No. 1, *BBHP* of September-December 1888: IOLR/P/3119.

patel village system in Bombay Presidency. But there was one important contrast in approach between Bombay and Burma. While the government in India sought to eliminate the authority and influence of hereditary village officers, whom they saw as being highly corrupt and concealing the actual amounts of taxes being collected,²⁹ the colonial government in Burma was seeking to revive what it saw as the traditional village structure of the country.

During the early days of British rule in Lower Burma, the colonial authorities were far more concerned to secure substantial revenue, not least to cover the costs of the conquest, than the maintenance of order. From the early 1860s, the *thugyis* were given responsibility for the collection of the land revenue and *thathameda* (capitation) tax, in return for a percentage of the revenues collected. It was seen that, in carrying out this responsibility, he would use his personal influence with the villagers within his jurisdiction.

But at this time, the newly-established British administration knew relatively little about the traditional structure of village policing. In the early 1850s, for example, Sir Arthur Phayre, the Commissioner, argued that only the *gaungs*³⁰ were needed for the preservation of law and order in

²⁹ Rekha Bandyopadhyay, "Land System in India: A Historical Review," p. A151.

³⁰ In his understanding, *gaungs* were 'headman of a number of families or a small village [who] performed certain police functions under the superintendence of the Myothugyi, in Burmese local administration': in a letter written to Lord Dalhousie, dated 20 October 1853, Sir Arthur expressed his firm conviction that no other police would be as suitable to

Lower Burma.³¹ But as dacoity and gang robbery became increasingly more common, the British were forced to pay more attention to the challenge of policing rural Burma. Serious disorder, all too often led by village headmen and Buddhist monks, the 'spiritual' leaders of traditional Burmese society, had to be suppressed before the colony could be developed.³² From the British point of view, the outbreak of 'heinous' crime and social disorder in the second half of the 1880s, and in general rural disintegration, were the most serious threats to their authority. The repeated employment of military force was no solution. Attention needed to be focused on rural policing.³³

For many British officials, the revitalization of Burma's village structures was severely disrupted in the early 1860s by the introduction of the Police Act of 1861. This British Indian police bill had a far-reaching impact upon policing and village policing in Burma. It was the first time that the modern conception of policing – the establishment of a civil police – was imposed upon a rural society previously policed by village headman and village

Pegu as the village police: Marquis of Dalhousie, *The Dalhousie-Phayre Correspondence 1852-1856*, edited by D.G.E. Hall. London: Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 101.

³¹ Ibid., p. 101.

³² From Colonel G.A. Stover, Officiating Commissioner of the Arakan Division to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, No. 83-4-2, dated 1 May 1887, in Draft Bill for the establishment of a system of village organization in Burma.

³³ *The Burma Village Manual*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1917, Appendix I – The Village System. Minute by Sir Charles Crosthwaite, dated 6 October 1890, p. 145.

elders. The legislation aimed to create an efficient instrument for the prevention and suppression of crime, and to align police functions, judicial and criminal, with those of other branches of the government.³⁴ The Act allowed for the establishment of modern police jurisdictions throughout the province, as well as the re-organization of the village police system in Burma.

This watershed event could be said to have disrupted the traditional structures of village administration. The imposition of higher levels of police authority could be said to have undermined the authority and influence of village officials such as the *thugyis* and *gaungs*.³⁵ The establishment of a colonial police force in towns and districts across Burma seriously disrupted the functions of village officials because it replaced the authority of the *thugyis* and *gaungs* in the detection and punishment of local

³⁴ See particularly Section 23 (Duties of Police Officers) of the Police Act, 1861, which reads as follows: 'It shall be the duty of every police-officer promptly to obey and execute all orders and warrants lawfully issued to him by any competent authority; to collect and communicate intelligence affecting the public peace; to prevent the commission of offences and public nuisances; to detect and bring offenders to justice and to apprehend all persons whom he is legally authorized to apprehend, and for whose apprehension sufficient ground exists: and it shall be lawful for every police-officer, for any of the purposes mentioned in this section, without a warrant, to enter and inspect any drinking-shop, gaming-house or other place of resort of loose and disorderly characters.' *The Abridged Law Manual for Sub-Inspectors of Police, Burma*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1926, The Police Act, 1861, as modified up to the 7th March 1903, p. 5.

³⁵ From Colonel W.C. Plant, Commissioner of the Tenasserim Division, to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Burma, No. 896-392, dated 25 April 1887, in Index No. 1, *BBHP* of September 1888: IOLR/P/3119.

crime. Yet *thugyis*, in addition to their tax collecting duties, were essential for the surveillance and detection of crime: they knew everything that went on in the community, and in particular were aware of the presence of suspicious strangers.³⁶ The establishment of a colonial police jurisdiction adjacent to the village tract reduced the responsibility of the *thugyis* simply to reporting crime and any suspicious behaviour to the nearest police station (*thana*) or outpost (*kin*).³⁷ It is possible that this disjuncture increased crime. Between 1878 and 1885, the number of violent crimes, mainly dacoity and robbery, increased by 132 percent.³⁸ Alarmed by these shocking statistics, the colonial authorities first ordered the construction of stockades for every village or the re-grouping of villages to bring unfenced villages within a nearby settlement with a stockade village. The administration then re-examined the policing functions of village officials.

After the conquest of Upper Burma, complaints were heard that the rural police did not see themselves as village police officers due to the fact that they were under the supervision of Township Officers. Besides, their

³⁶ From H. St. G. Tucker, Commissioner of the Eastern Division, Upper Burma, to the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, No. 316, dated 7 October 1887, in Points connected with the proposed Upper Burma Village Regulation, in Index No. 13, *BBHP* of December 1887: IOLR/P/2338.

³⁷ *Report on the Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1886*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1887, Resolution pp. 1, 8.

³⁸ Chief Commissioner's Resolution on the report of the Committee appointed to consider the re-organisation of the Lower Burma Police, Judicial Department Circular No. 17 of 1889, in Index No. 15, *BBHP* of May 1889: IOLR/P/3553.

functions were not clearly laid down and they received little or no remuneration.³⁹ Substantial reform was required to re-establish the authority of village officials, and to re-define their responsibilities in the policing of rural Burma.⁴⁰

It is worth emphasizing again that, due to the great variety of village systems in pre-colonial and early colonial Burma, British officials coming from various districts seemed to have greatly different views of Burmese village officials. Unlike Sir Arthur Phayre who, in the 1850s, argued that the administration of rural Burma required only the assistance of *gaungs*, after 1885 British officials tended to dismiss the position of the *gaungs* and gave much greater emphasis to *kyedangyi* who, they believed, was genuinely 'the foundation of the whole system of district administration and on his loyalty and industry its efficiency must greatly depend.'⁴¹ Those different understandings and perceptions among British officials as to how rural Burma had been policed before the imposition of British rule, greatly complicated and perhaps confused the discussions that took place within the colonial administration in the late 1880s leading to reform.

³⁹ *Report on the Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1886*, Resolution p. 8.

⁴⁰ Abstract of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor General of India, assembled for the purpose of making Laws and Regulations under the provisions of the Act of Parliament 24&25 Vic., cap.67.

⁴¹ Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Re-organisation of the Police Force of Burma, 1886-1887 [henceforth *RCRPB*], pp. 35-6, in Re-organisation of the Police file: NADM 4/1 (22) 1318.

In 1879, Sir Augustus Rivers Thompson, who had been Chief Commissioner of Lower Burma between 1875 and 1878, clearly anxious about the amount of crime in the British territory and specifically concerned about the apathy apparently being shown by villagers to the relentlessly rising level of crime, urged the re-organization of the village police. In the *Statement of Objects and Reasons for the Burma District Cesses and Rural Police Act, 1880*, he noted:

The need of an efficient rural police to supplement the regular police and act as a link between them and the people has been long felt in Burma. ... The materials of such a body exist in the village headmen or *kyaydangyees* and the *gaungs* who supervise them; but the status and duties of these officers are ill-defined and imperfectly understood, and the funds available for their remuneration have, as the country has advanced in wealth, become altogether insufficient to secure the services of respectable men.⁴²

The principal aims of the 1880 act were to provide both the *kyedangyis* and *gaungs* with defined legal powers and to establish for them a fixed rate of remuneration, to be paid for from central and local government funds, from house and agricultural taxes as well as revenues derived from fisheries and land. The new legislation described precisely what duties village headmen (note that the term '*thugyi*' would be replaced by 'village headman'), *kyedangyis* and *gaungs* were expected to perform under the direction of the Deputy Commissioner, Sub-divisional Magistrate, and

⁴² Statement of objects and reasons by Sir Augustus Rivers Thompson, in Act to amend law relating to district cesses and rural police in British Burma.

other officers.⁴³ Indeed, the *gaungs* would now be appointed as ‘a supervisor of village headmen and were always, though improperly, looked upon as more exclusively a police official than the *kyedangyi*.’⁴⁴

Despite beginning in Upper Burma, the drive to revitalize the village system had in fact started in Lower Burma after the Second Anglo-Burmese war. Even so, legislation was implemented in Lower Burma only in the late 1880s. The *Lower Burma Village Act*, 1889 (Act III of 1889) provided greater precision in setting headman’s remuneration and the rules of succession.⁴⁵ Although there were substantial differences in socio-economic conditions between Upper and Lower Burma, and in terms of the level of crime, it was decided to impose the Upper Burma village administration ‘model’ onto Lower Burma. It was held that the introduction of a more ‘well-grounded’ and more systematic structure of village administration would allow the headman to exert a greater measure of control over the village and thus challenge the disorderly social conditions found throughout rural Lower Burma.

In 1890, Sir Charles Crosthwaite was appointed as head of the Burma administration. In an important minute – ‘Village System’ – Sir Charles laid

⁴³ From Colonel G.A. Strover, Officiating Commissioner of Arakan Division to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, No. 83-4-2, dated 1 May 1887, in Draft Bill for the establishment of a system of village organization in Burma.

⁴⁴ From the Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Burma to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, No. 189-85P, dated 8 September 1888, in *ibid*.

⁴⁵ The Lower Burma Village Act, 1889: IOLR/L/PJ/6/246 File 388.

down the key principles for village administration in Burma. It was apparent that the secure administration of Burma would rest to a considerable extent on the ability of the village to detect and suppress crime. In other words, it was crucial to establish or re-establish local agencies:

... [the legislation] gave him [a village official] sufficient powers and the support of the law. It also enacted the joint responsibility of the village in the case of certain crimes; the duty of all to resist the attacks of gangs of robbers and to take measures to protect their villages against such attacks. ... It gave the district officer power to remove from a village, and cause to reside elsewhere, persons who were aiding and abetting dacoits and criminals. This enactment...was framed in accordance with the old customary law and with the feeling of the people. It strengthened our hands more and gave us a tighter grip on the country than anything else could have done.⁴⁶

The Debates

Although there were many aspects of policing that caused considerable disagreement among those who submitted their views to the Police Commission, all appear to have agreed that 'no scheme for the improvement of the Lower Burma police force will be effective which omits the consideration of the present condition of the Rural Police.'⁴⁷ In other

⁴⁶ Sir Charles Crosthwaite, *The Pacification of Burma*. London: Edward Arnold, 1912, pp. 81-82.

⁴⁷ Proceedings of the Police Commission, 1888, p. 1, in Re-organisation of the Police file.

words, the reform of the entire police force in Lower Burma could not be separated from the re-organization of the village police.⁴⁸

Moreover, when regular policing was becoming extremely costly, village policing began to look a cheap option, as well as being more effective. But to make village policing effective, the revenue-collecting functions of village officials would need to be clearly defined and kept separate from policing duties. In brief, while *thugyis* would be responsible mainly for the collection of taxes and the general surveillance of the village, his subordinates would have clear responsibilities for police duties.

Undoubtedly, finance was an important driver for the re-organization of rural policing.⁴⁹ In other words, one important ambition behind the British attempt to reform the village police was to make the best use of just one or two suitable village officials, who would have charge of all police-related issues, and thus abolish those village positions that often overlapped with those of the *thugyis* and *kyedangyis*. Burmese officials such as *gaungs* had been remunerated under the old system. The Commission agreed to abolish the *gaungs* and put responsibilities onto the *kyedangyis*, now to be called by the British 'the headmen'. In fact, in the view of many, *kyedangyis* were to be made the sole government agent within the village, and in this way, it was thought, they would secure more pay and prestige, while the earlier conflicts with other village officials would be removed. Hence the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The Burma District Cesses and Rural Police Act, 1880 [Act II of 1880], in Act to amend law relating to district cesses and rural police in British Burma.

Commission agreed that the *kyedangyi*'s power should be increased to allow them to impose fines of up to five rupees or imprisonment of up to 20 hours for petty crimes within the village. At the same time, the abolition of the *yazawutgaungs* would reduce the duplication of responsibilities within the village and make possible further increases in salary and prestige for *kyedangyis*. This would attract good people to this position.⁵⁰ With the savings from the abolition of the *yazawutgaungs*, the *kyedangyis* were now to be paid in the form of grants of land or fishery rights. The British also set aside the salary savings to purchase land for the *kyedangyis*.⁵¹ But some British officials did not support the increased remuneration of *kyedangyis* and his subordinates, arguing that Burman officials 'do not care for a monthly salary ... [because] position and influence are more valued.' This was the view of R.A. Fanshawe, District Superintendent of Police from Henzada:

position and influence are more valued by the *kyedangyi* than salary. The *kyedangyi* used to be the immediate subordinate of the *thugyi*. But when the *thugyi* was converted into a mere tax collector some time in 1864, I think, he lost his influence and the *kyedangyi*'s local power fits with it. I would weed out a large number of the present bad *kyedangyi*.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Evidence taken by the Police Commission, p. 9, in Re-organisation of the Police file.

The decision to pay the rural police with grants of land rather than a salary was not without difficulties. These grants of land were largely for cultivation purposes, but in some regions, where the soil lacked fertility, it was unsuitable for agriculture. Here it was proposed that a cash salary be paid instead.⁵³ Indeed, initially the *kyedangyis* in most districts were paid in cash every month. The rate differed from district to district, and the salary 'was raised locally', presumably from the revenue in each district. In Pegu, to give an example, they received 6, 8, or 10 rupees a month, depending upon their grade. In some districts, *kyedangyi* previously received as little as one rupee or no salary at all.⁵⁴ Ten rupees was the highest salary for a rural police official at that time, compared to around 12 rupees for a third-class constable. It was proposed then that the pay should be increased and the responsibilities made less onerous.⁵⁵

Moreover, in order to reduce the humiliation often inflicted on village elders or headmen, *kyedangyis* would now be appointed on the recommendation of the villagers along hereditary lines. This would improve the relationship between the villagers and government officials, some of whom had been arguing that the increases in crime had been the

⁵³ It was not clear how large the land grant would be: G. J. S. Hodgkinson, one of the Commission members, proposed that it should be around 5 acres. Evidence taken by the Police Commission, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 1-2, 17.

result of an absence of contact between the police and the people.⁵⁶ It is clear that the Police Commission was attempting to turn the *kyedangyi*s into all-purpose village officials, taking on the roles previously exercised by petty officials. Not only were *kyedangyi*s now given more power to investigate and punish but the relationship between them and the regular police was also now clearly described. In the Code of Criminal Procedure, for example, the duties of both *kyedangyi* and *thugyi* were explicitly stated: the former's power was primarily stated in section 45 as being to 'render personal assistance in the investigation of cases': the latter, according to section 157, were granted certain police powers in 'the investigation of any cognizable cases which a court, having jurisdiction over the local area within the limits of his circle, would have power to enquire into and try ... until he is relieved of the enquiry by a regular police officer.'⁵⁷

In fact, the establishment of village jurisdictions and village officials' judicial and police powers was just one of the measures introduced by the colonial administration to improve the efficiency of village administration. The physical character of the Burmese village – often remote and isolated – was believed to have encouraged the incidence of crime. Larger circles of villages were broken up to prevent the exercise of arbitrary authority by the headmen (*kyedangyi*). The headman, the sole agent between the village and the colonial authorities, responsible for the detection of bad characters and

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 8, 21.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

suspicious behaviour in the village, was now given responsibility for smaller-sized settlements, usually some 25 households.⁵⁸

In reality, the relationship between the regular police and the village was rather remote for only *kyedangyis* were now required to report crime or any suspicious behaviour to the police. The village authorities were given a freer hand in other aspects of police work within the settlement. The institutions that the police came into contact, sometimes conflict, with more regularly were the other judicial branches of the government. It is important to point out that the police were not entirely an independent department but were checked, to a certain extent, by Deputy Commissioners and District Magistrates.⁵⁹ In particular, the relationship between the magistrates and the police was a delicate one because the district magistrates were empowered to enforce the regulations in police matters: inevitably, therefore, magistrates were among the main critics of the police.⁶⁰ According to the Police Act, 1861, the police had the authority

⁵⁸ From H. St. G. Tucker, Commissioner of the Eastern Division, Upper Burma, to the Chief Secretary of the Chief Commissioner, Burma, No. 316, dated 7 October 1887, in Index No. 13, *BBHP* of December 1887.

⁵⁹ Evidence taken by the Police Commission, pp. 27, 4.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Section 17 of the Police Act regarding the appointment of special police officers (in times of severe disorder): 'When it shall appear that any unlawful assembly, or riot or disturbance of the peace has taken place, or may be reasonably apprehended, and that the police-force ordinarily employed for preserving the peace is not sufficient for its preservation and for the protection of the inhabitants and the security of property in the place where such unlawful assembly or riot or disturbance of the peace has occurred, or is

to arrest, to employ additional police officers, to furnish additional guards or punitive police in disturbed areas, and to punish a criminal but only on orders from district magistrates. The control of the police in any district, whether civil or military, was in the hands of the district magistrate, subject to the orders of the Commissioner of the Division.⁶¹ According to a police officer turned district magistrate, G.M.S. Carter:

... the notion that Magistrates are to have nothing to do with enquiries and only to try criminals placed before them is entirely wrong. The District Magistrate is responsible for the peace of his district. He ought to know as much as the District Superintendent knows of the crimes committed, of the progress of the enquiry. ... Generally the District Superintendent ought to recognize that the Deputy Commissioner is the district head of the police. ... I think my Deputy Commissioners saw I had to do my own work, and let me alone, but they knew what was

apprehended, it shall be lawful for any police-officer not below the rank of Inspector to apply to the nearest Magistrate to appoint so many of the resident of the neighbourhood as such police officers may require to act as special police officers for such time and within such limits as he shall deem necessary; and the Magistrate to whom, such application is made shall, unless he sees cause to the contrary, comply with the application.' *The Abridged Law Manual for Sub-Inspectors of Police*, Burma. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1926, The Police Act, 1861, as modified up to the 7th March 1903, p. 4.

⁶¹ From the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Secretary to the Government of India, No. 551-345P, dated 19 June 1888, in Progress of Police Administration in Upper Burma during 1887, in Index No. 15, *BBHP* of June 1888: IOLR/P/3118.

going on. They might have interposed if they wished and I should have accepted the position.⁶²

Some British officials like R.A. Fanshawe, the Assistant Commissioner, Allanmyo, argued that the deterioration in the effectiveness of the police could be attributed to 'excessive interference' from the judicial and executive parts of the government administration. As District Magistrates had the right to reject orders passed by District Superintendents of Police, the authority of the latter was considerably undermined.⁶³

In other words it was commonly argued that the district magistrates were interfering in police decision-making and internal affairs. Even after the functions of both the magistrates and the police were more clearly defined, the relationship between the two was complex and confusing. Intervention by magistrates could affect police *morale* and performance: and in some circumstances, decisions taken by the district superintendent of police were heavily criticized or changed. According to T. W. Hall, Director of Land Records, some Deputy Commissioners interfered constantly in the work of the police, and were 'so injudicious as to let the police see that they are taking control out of the hands of the District Superintendents.'⁶⁴

The evidently inferior position of the police in relation to other parts of the administration was a controversial issue throughout the last decades of the

⁶² Evidence taken by the Police Commission, p. 22.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.15.

19th century. One District Superintendent argued that the District Superintendent of Police was a 'nobody', since he had no authority to dismiss, fine, or reallocate his own men without the decision being passed to the District Magistrate.⁶⁵ The District Magistrate, according to Fanshawe, should be the channel of communication between the subordinate magistracy and the District Superintendent of Police in all criminal and judicial matters, for example regarding the investigation of cases. But Fanshawe proposed that the investigation of a crime must be completed before the case was sent to the district magistrates for trial. The police would have the authority to complete an investigation, although they could be advised by district magistrates when appropriate.⁶⁶ But before an investigation was sent to the magistrate or whenever an order was passed, the District Superintendent of Police should seek advice, on a daily basis when possible, from the Deputy Commissioner. In other words, the District Superintendents of Police came under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner. However the Deputy Commissioners were expected to interfere only lightly in police organisational matters and investigations. It was critical that an effective working relationship be maintained. Fanshawe concluded that whenever the cordial relations between Deputy Commissioner and District Superintendent of Police ended, 'one or other should quit the district.'⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Opinions of selected officers on the subject of the Police Administration of Lower Burma, p. 37, in Re-organisation of the Police file.

⁶⁶ Evidence taken by the Police Commission, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

In the view of one district magistrate who formerly had been a police officer, G.M.S. Carter, the district magistrate was responsible for maintaining law and order of his district. The magistrate, therefore, was allowed to enquire into the investigation of criminal cases whenever he had doubts about the progress being made.⁶⁸ At the same time, in some districts there was little or no tension between the magistrates and the police. Disagreeing with Fanshawe, the Deputy Commissioner of Thongwa, Captain Johnson, argued that the relationship between the two was 'satisfactory', for the police in his district were 'independent of District Magistrates.' But he added that it was necessary to bring the police partly under the authority of the district magistrates, enabling the latter, for example, to dismiss certain police officers with (or without) prior notice being given to the Inspector-General; to 'transfer any police officer or constable, European or Burman, below the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police with consent of local Government'; 'to promote a 1st class yazawutgaungs to a sergeant of regular police or head constables'; and, perhaps most importantly, 'rules should be framed to prevent the District Magistrate being burdened with a District Superintendent of Police who does not co-operate with him or obey his orders.' There were also, of course, rivalries within the police force, notably between District Superintendents of Police and the Inspector-General. It was therefore proposed that the District Superintendent should be responsible for the efficiency of his men, while the Inspector-General would be responsible for the general well-being and finances of the police force as a whole.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

This chapter has argued that in the late 1880s, Burma's colonial government saw the revitalization of village administration and of the the village police as a crucial and cost-effective instrument for the suppression of crime. But at the same time, because the British knew little about village administration under the Burmese kings, they sought examples from elsewhere, and finally drew on the village administration model familiar to them in Bombay Presidency. Yet the levels of crime in Burma remained extremely high, and this provoked the discussions that took place within Burma's police administration in the late 1880s. One important conclusion drawn from those discussions was that the Burmese village officials, the *kyedangyis*, *thugyis*, *yazawutgaungs*, ten-house *gaungs*, though widely accepted as the foundation of Burmese village administration, had ill-defined, over-lapping functions, and received no remuneration. It was therefore unlikely that effective and able individuals would now come forward from within the community and assume responsibility for maintaining law and order within the village.

The British colonial administration therefore sought to define precisely the policing and tax-collecting functions of village officials and to lay down firm scales of remuneration in order to attract capable headmen. But these changes alone did not ensure that rural crime was effectively challenged in the decades to come, or even that rural communities themselves became committed to the suppression of crime. Nevertheless, in essence, the British authorities saw the village administration as the central instrument in the maintenance of order in rural Burma, inadequate though that instrument was proving to be, and, in the suppression of crime, now turned their attention elsewhere.

Feeding the Indian military police

For centuries an impression was prevalent among the general mass of the people that the physical well-being of a person very largely depended on the quality of the food ordinarily consumed by him. (...) The subject of nutrition and food values is a comparatively new science and recent researches have indicated that the true value of food lies mainly in its quality rather than in the quantity consumed.¹

E.J.L. Andrew, a former Assistant Protector of Immigrants and Emigrants, Rangoon, made the above remark to suggest a link between Indian workers' nutrition and their working performance and self-esteem. Although his observation was made in the early 1930s and addressed specifically to the Indian working class in Rangoon, it suggests that the British authorities in Burma were well aware that the Indians in the province, if properly fed with food they appreciated, were more likely to resist physical and mental deterioration as well as deadly disease.

In the Burma Police, this perception was also common, and even more so with respect to the Indian military police stationed in Upper Burma. The selection

¹ E.J.L. Andrew, *Indian Labour in Rangoon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 144.

of Indian military police to support the British army during the pacification campaign (1887-90) and the expeditionary work that followed, divided the role and function of the Indian military police from the Burmese-dominated civil police force. Garrisoned in distant outposts, sometimes in barely accessible areas, the caste-clad Indian military police were not encouraged to mingle with the local community, and it was very unlikely that, not knowing the local language and customs, they would be able to purchase their own food from local bazaars. Indian food stuffs such as *atta* (wheat flour for making a variety of Indian flat breads like *naan*, *paratha*, and *chapatti*), *daal* (prepared pulses such as lentils, peas and beans) and *ghee* (clarified butter), as well as salt and spices such as chillies, turmeric and *amchoor* (mango powder – also spelled *amchur*) had to be imported into Upper Burma since, it was emphasized, the Indian military police, who were mostly recruited from northern India, would not eat anything else, notably rice. Thus the Indian police depended on government rations. This left the force vulnerable, especially during the rainy season when some military police outposts were cut off from the rest of Upper Burma, and during famine in India, when food prices soared and supplies diminished.

The British saw feeding the Indian police stationed there as one of the greatest difficulties in policing Upper Burma. Yet the Indian force was regarded as indispensable for the preservation of law and order in Upper Burma, for Indians were said to be far more disciplined, loyal and easier to train than the

indigenous Burman, who was often criticized by the British as 'either a waster due to vices or a man who enlists to tide over a temporary difficulty.'²

For British officials in Burma, it was important to provide reasonably comfortable conditions for the Indian military police in order to prevent discontent that could jeopardize the relationship between the colonial rulers and the sepoys: thus 'an arrangement of this nature [for the supply of Indian military police by the government], inasmuch as it interferes with the natural course of supply and demand and is calculated to produce difficulty and discontent when the time for withdrawing it arrives, needs [and had] special justification and authority.'³ In other words, the British authorities made strong efforts to supply food to military police outposts, although it was often difficult to supply the stations in the more remote hills. Indeed Sir Frederick Fryer, the Lieutenant-Governor of Burma between 1897 and 1903, noted that 'the conditions of the military police [in Upper Burma] ... compared very unfavourably with those applying to native troops in the same locality, and ...

² From E.C.S. Shuttleworth, Officiating Inspector-General of Police, Burma to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, dated Rangoon, 10 May 1920, in Proposals for improving the pay of the subordinate police-force in Burma, i.e. from Inspectors downwards, in *BBHP* of July 1920: IOLR/P/10816.

³ From W.M. Young, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India to the Chief Commissioner of Burma, Calcutta, 21 March 1888, in Arrangements for Rationing the Upper Burma Military Police, in Index No. 5, *BBHP* of April 1888: IOLR/L/P/3117.

these police were far worse off than their comrades in the plains of Burma.’⁴ As this chapter will illustrate, the issue of living conditions and health among the Indians of the Upper Burma military police would emerge again and again in communications between the Police Department and the Burmese government, and sometimes between the Burmese and the Indian governments.

Reading through the British Burma Home Proceedings from the late 1880s through to the beginning of the 20th century, it is striking that the correspondence relating to the police is often not concerned with law and order issues, such as crime detection and suppression. It is true that a few years earlier, as discussed in the previous chapter, an attempt was made to revitalize village policing, to create a bridge between the regular police and the village in order to provide for the basic prevention of crime. The restoration of the prestige and power of the village authorities, as argued earlier, was at the centre of the reform of police administration in Burma from the second half of the 1880s. But after concentrating on a strengthening of village administration and after the withdrawal of troops from Upper Burma in the late 1880s, the government of Burma began to focus on the performance of the police, that is on policing above the level of the village. Thus the official correspondence was now dominated by a number of practical issues, disease, police housing,

⁴ Conditions of service of military police in the Chin Hills, in A letter from His Excellency the Right Hon’ble Governor General of India in Council, to the Right Hon’ble Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for India – No. 294 (Salaries and Establishment – Political), dated Simla, 16 October 1895, *BBHP* of January 1896: IOLR/P/4883.

clothing and nutrition – and more so among the Indian element of the military police. Among the issues discussed, the provision of food was critical.

From 1886, Indians had been recruited in India to form the core of the military police battalions located in Upper Burma, replacing the costly regular British troops. The Indians were recruited *en masse* prominently among Punjabis from northern India. By mid-1887, around 8,000 Indian military police were garrisoned in Upper Burma. A year later, there were 21 military police battalions in Upper Burma alone: namely, the Mandalay, Bhamo, Katha, Shwebo and Ruby Mines Battalions, Ye-u, Sagaing, Kubo Valley, Kyaukse, Upper Chindwin, Lower Chindwin, Myingyan, Pagan, Minbu, Taungdwingyi, Meiktila, Yamethin, Pyinmana and Railway Battalions, as well as the Shan and Chin Frontier Police forces.⁵

In Upper Burma, with its dry plains and fever-ridden jungle-covered mountains inhabited by the hill peoples, the British faced severe difficulties during the pacification. Military expeditions in Upper Burma were greatly hampered by heavy rains, disease, and a lack of basic infrastructure such as roads and bridges.⁶ Even though most major towns were linked by road and,

⁵ With the extension of the railway, as far as Katha, Bhamo and Myitkyina by the end of the century, the Upper Burma military police battalions were amalgamated, such that only eight remained, namely the Bhamo, Myitkyina, Mandalay, Magwe, Chin Hills, Northern Shan States, Shwebo and Ruby Mines Battalions.

⁶ Sir Charles Crosthwaite, *The Pacification of Burma*. London: Edward Arnold, 1912, p. 66.

in later years, the railway, many parts of Upper Burma, even in the plains let alone the hills, were hardly accessible.

The British colonial administration had decided, on the departure of British troops at the end of the pacification campaign, to bring in reinforcements of military police from India, essentially because Upper Burma was still regarded as susceptible to severe unrest. But with the arrival of the military police in substantial numbers, it was very difficult – if not impossible – to secure basic necessities such as food, adequate lodgings, clean clothes, and medical care. At the same time it was a government priority, it was claimed, to make service in the military police service attractive.

With the formation of the military police, it was discovered that physical conditions in Upper Burma were hostile not only to the military force as a whole but specifically to the Indian military police. The supply of Indian foodstuffs was poor and considerably more expensive than local food: and the harsh climate rendered most military police posts prone to malaria and dengue fever, especially during the heaviest months of the monsoon season (August and October). In 1888, for example, rampant diseases such as malaria in the hills contributed to a high average death rate among the military police in Upper Burma of 5.32 percent annually.⁷ A study written by a civil surgeon at Kindat, a small town on the Indian border to the northwest, showed that sepoys were more exposed to malaria during the years with heavier rainfall.

⁷ *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Year 1888*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1889, Upper Burma Military Police, p. 11.

An improvement in sanitary conditions in the military police barracks, better drainage, jungle-clearing, and larvae reduction, could lower the incidence of malaria.⁸ In addition, a dose of quinine was distributed weekly throughout the year to constables garrisoned in the less healthy posts, and during the rainy season in other areas.⁹

In the most unhealthy posts, those with high death rates among the Indian officers, the British replaced the Indians with indigenous recruits such as Karens or Kachins, who naturally appeared to have greater resistance. Among the 17,000 Indian police stationed in Burma, mostly in Upper Burma, the average fatality rate may have been acceptable. But there were deadly towns and districts: in Myadaung, a town situated by the Irrawaddy to the west of Bhamo, the death rate in 1909 reached 14.61 percent, with a further 15 percent on sick leave in India, almost all of whom seeking to extend their stay there for as long as possible.¹⁰ In Katha, a quiet town north of Mandalay on the banks of the Irrawaddy, a town made famous as the setting (fictionalized as Kyauktada) in George

⁸ From Major C.E. Williams, Sanitary Commissioner, Burma, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma (through the Inspector-General of Police), No. C-198, dated 22 April 1910, in 'Measures taken to improve the sanitary conditions of Military Police Posts in various districts,' in *BBHP* of September 1909: IOLR/P/8070.

⁹ Report by Honorary Lieutenant L.K. Rodriguez, Military Assistant Surgeon, Medical Officer, Upper Chindwin Division, on Anti-Malarial Measures at the out-posts of the Military Police, Monywa Battalion, Upper Chindwin, for the year ending 1909, in *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Orwell's, *Burmese Days*, in one year in the late 1880s, out of 1,000 odd men, 159 died from disease alone.¹¹ As Katha was not perceived as a 'deadly' town, this was a shocking number. That said, the high death rate was found only during the first year of occupation, as the jungle was being cleared: in later years, fewer constables suffered from deadly diseases. In addition, not all Indian races were equally prone to falling to disease: the Commander of Bhamo battalion observed that the Hindustanis were more prone to illness, while the Gurkhas, even if they were more liable to contract cholera and smallpox, coped well with the Burmese climate.¹²

Conditions for the police in the hills were said to be much worse than conditions on the plains of Upper Burma. The military police in the Chin Hills and in certain parts of the Shan States, in particular, were known to be notoriously difficult battalions to maintain. The hardship in serving in the Chin Hills arose from the inaccessible nature of the region and from the need to keep a close watch on the Siyins and Soktes (Chin tribes), and convinced the authorities that it would not be possible to maintain a military police presence without making concessions similar to those granted to the regular British troops. Thus from 1895, the privileges provided for the Chin Hills battalion were increased, by granting free rations and extra warm clothes, and by allowing the families of constables free passage to Burma and then to the hills,

¹¹ *Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1888*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1889, Military Police, p. 26.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 32.

despite the additional costs involved. By the mid-1890s, in order to persuade military police officers to remain in the service, their working and living conditions needed to match those of the Indian Army. The withdrawal of British troops from the Chin Hills would save the government 120,000 rupees.¹³ The savings could be used, it was argued, in providing for a new military police battalion in the northern Chin Hills. Even with additional British officers and the special concessions, this was still a good investment because there would be a net saving of 80,000 rupees.¹⁴

Granting additional privileges to all military police constables in the hills may have incurred heavy additional expenditure but it was necessary to make the service more attractive. Without the additional provision, after three years, almost all the constables in the Chin Hills battalion would withdraw and enlist in the better-paid army in the same locality.¹⁵

¹³ A saving of 120,000 rupees secured by the withdrawal of troops was a substantial sum: the annual budget for the Lower Burma Civil Police was around 1.7 million rupees during 1896-97: Chief Commissioner's Resolution on the police budget for Upper and Lower Burma for 1897-98, in *BBHP* of January 1897: IOLR/P/5103.

¹⁴ From His Excellency the Right Hon'ble Governor General of India in Council, to the Right Hon'ble Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India – No. 294 (Salaries and Establishment – Political), dated Simla, 16 October 1895, in Conditions of service of military police in the Chin Hills, in *BBHP* of January 1896.

¹⁵ From Lieutenant-Colonel G.S. Eyre, Officiating Inspector-General of Police, Burma, to the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, No. 4160, dated 14 June 1895, in Recommendations

However the real challenge for the authorities was to feed the military police in the hills. The rations provided elsewhere in Upper Burma were inadequate for the hills. Moreover, basic foodstuffs, such as vegetables, could not be found locally, and since rations were delivered only once a month in the hills, the Indian military police inevitably faced a scarcity of fresh food once their rations ran out. The Political Officer of the Chin Hills thus feared a deterioration in the military police posted there:

the men of the battalion, with due respect, have reported that they are losers by serving in the Chin Hills under present arrangements, and when one considers the nature of the Sikhs (of what the battalion is very largely composed) one recognizes that he must either be allowed to go, or his position improved, for he will not serve at a loss in the Chin Hills when there are numerous regiments in Burma which would gladly welcome him, especially as the men are of very fine physique and appearance and have the right at the termination of three years' service to cut their names and re-enlist in any other police battalion in Burma.¹⁶

How to retain the martial-races to serve in the military police attracted much attention from police administrators in Burma, and, as we have seen from the

for the amelioration of the condition of the military police of the Northern Chin Hills Battalion, in *BBHP* for June 1895: IOLR/P/4678.

¹⁶ From B.S. Carey, Political Officer, Chin Hills, to the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma (through Inspector-General of Military Police), No. 67-35, dated 25 March 1895, in *Ibid*.

example of the Chin Hills Battalion, attempts were made to increase military police pay and food rations to match those of the army and of general living costs in the country. However, it was almost impossible to enforce one regulation to cover the whole country. Indeed within Upper Burma alone, differences in terrain and climate forced the British to be more flexible, and to provide the Indian military police with greater benefits, particularly in the provision of food.

Rations vs. compensation systems

Before attempting to explore how the supply of food for the Upper Burma military police was actually run, it is worth noting that while the British granted rations to the Indian military police at reduced rates as a means to make the service as attractive as possible to Indians of a better class, the Burmese civil police in both Lower and Upper Burma received no concessions of food, clothing, or accommodation, except in those years when food was scarce and expensive.¹⁷ Thus, in the provision of food and the basic necessities of life, there was a clear discrimination, again, in the treatment of Indian and Burmese police constables by the colonial regime.

¹⁷ Generally speaking, Indian military police officers, mostly bachelors, were housed in military barracks or quarters. But the Burmese civil police, due to financial pressures, were often given only wood or thatch to build their own house or cottage at their own expense. From 'Provision of suitable house accommodation for the civil police at stations and outposts', in *BBHP* of February 1895: IOLR/P/4678.

As noted earlier, from the beginning of the occupation of Upper Burma, the delivery of food to the Indian military police stationed there had overshadowed other aspects of police administration. It was the most expensive and arguably the most difficult aspect of police administration, for it greatly affected the *morale* and general well-being of the entire military police force. The provision of food for the Indians in Upper Burma had always been difficult. Indeed, Sir Charles Crosthwaite had once remarked that the military police in Upper Burma 'were not properly fed'.¹⁸

Part of the difficulty was that the Indians were prepared to accept only their own traditional food. An experiment was undertaken to provide them with rice rather than atta: but it was reported that the health of the Indians deteriorated quickly without wheat flour rations.¹⁹ In larger districts, such as Mandalay and Pakokku along the railway, and other posts on the banks of the Irrawaddy, Indian food could be obtained from local bazaars. But in other districts, it was difficult to secure basic foods such as meat, vegetables, and spices.

The provision of food to the military police in Upper Burma was carried out in two different ways, either by providing rations or through compensation. The

¹⁸ From the Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Secretary to the Government of India, No. 228-39P, dated 9 April 1888, in Index No. 5, *BBHP* of April 1888: IOLR/P/3117.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

former provided the police with at least three key ingredients essential to every Indian's survival, namely atta, ghee and daal. The rations were calculated to cost approximately four rupees per person per month and were deducted from the constable's salary. The shortages of food for the police stationed in the distant north-west highlands of the Chin and the Kachin Hills, and in the Shan Plateau to the east, where 'food necessary for their support is not procurable at all,' and more broadly the need to supply the military police serving over an enormous area with adequate rations and warm clothing became so critical that a Commissariat Office was established to take charge of food rations.²⁰ This led to the establishment of the Department of Police Supply and Clothing (henceforth referred to as the 'Supply Department') in early 1887. The department was initially founded on a temporary basis, intended to operate for only one year or two. But the difficulties in obtaining and transporting food from India proved to be so great that the department survived through till the early 1940s.

The Superintendent of the Police Supply and Clothing Department therefore became a key position for the maintenance of the military police presence in Upper Burma. The rations system was used to supply military police battalions in distant posts where Indian food could not be obtained locally.

²⁰ These two areas were the most mountainous regions of Burma: the highest point in the Shan Plateau, with an average height of 3,000 to 4,000 feet, is on the eastern flank of the area around the south-west corner of Lashio. The Northern Hills, spanning the north-west region, was strategic to the British, due to the oil riches in the Chindwin Valley. Major C.M. Enriquez, *ABC of Burma: Part I, The Country*. Karachi: Modern Publishing & Co., 1943, p. 17.

The compensation system was a far less complex and more convenient arrangement for the authorities, and was thus used for the larger towns, such as Mandalay, and at headquarters, where Indian food could be conveniently acquired, and at much cheaper rates. The compensation system typically allowed a contractor to supply food at regular intervals to military police posts, from where it was purchased by the Indian constables at a fixed rate, which was usually higher than the prices in the local bazaar, since delivery costs were added. Consequently, the Indian constables received a fixed payment for rations, usually two rupees per month.²¹

The authorities in Calcutta often urged the Burma administration to abandon the rations system and focus on granting compensation – for ‘dearness of provisions’, occasionally referred to as the ‘self-feeding’ system – for the whole of Upper Burma. Calcutta claimed that the rations scheme was ‘unwise’ and simply too expensive. Having personally experienced hardships in Upper Burma during the pacification campaign, Sir Charles Crosthwaite argued against these biased views of the Government of India, on the grounds that: most remote military police battalions were not sufficiently organized; none spoke the local language; and some were being left without a British Commander. These Indians could never feed themselves, and, garrisoned in the remote hills, would depend entirely on the delivery of food from the plains of Upper Burma.

²¹ The rate of compensation depended on the market price of food. For example, 2 rupees per month were paid to every constable when the price of wheat flour fell below 14 lbs. per rupee: but only 1 rupee would be paid when the price fell below 19 lbs. per rupee.

It is no surprise to see senior British officials such as Sir Charles Crosthwaite repeatedly insisting to the Government of India that the compensation scheme, which was common in India Proper, would fail in Upper Burma for two obvious reasons. First, no contractor would be able to deliver food supplies to each remote post; and second, the current rate of compensation was feasible only for the Indians in the large towns. It was estimated that the cost of transporting food into the hills was as high as four rupees per man per month.²²

Even if the compensation system was employed in the larger towns and the rations system in the rest of Upper Burma, the Supply Department still faced a major problem: how to deliver food and clothing to the 17,000 military police in every part of Upper Burma. The cost of rations varied considerably from district to district: to give an example, in 1898, while ration costs in Mandalay were as low as five rupees per month, in Lashio, some 177 miles from Mandalay on the Shan Plateau, and in Myitkyina, they were triple and double respectively, for the same amount of food.²³ These differences reflected difficulties in transportation. Contractors were sought to undertake the delivery of the rations to distant posts but, apparently, local Indian producers

²² Question of Granting Compensation in lieu of Supplying Rations to Military Police in Upper Burma, in Index No. 16, *BBHP* of January to July 1887: IOLR/P/2882.

²³ From Lieutenant-Colonel Peile, to the Chief Secretary, No. 6L, dated Maymyo, 8 June 1898, in Proposed permanent retention of the Police Supply and Clothing Department, in *BBHP* of July 1898: IOLR/P/5342.

avoided government contracts. At Lashio, a small Indian community which reared cattle and produced dairy products was approached to supply ghee for the 500 military police garrisoned there. This contract would produce for the community a monthly profit of 1,000 rupees. The ghee would be transported to the military police headquarters and not to the posts in the hills. But the offer was turned down, with the explanation that 'they said they had never done it and therefore could not do it. They were Indians, some Gurkhas and some Gwalas, and yet they would not do it.'²⁴

The precise dietary requirements and preferences of the Indian military police created further difficulties. The additional cost involved in supplying the Indians in the hills with atta, a crop unknown to the Burmese population until the arrival of the military police in Upper Burma, encouraged the authorities to look for alternative recruits who were rice eaters. In 1900, a proposal was put forward by the Inspector General of Police to increase substantially the number of Gurkhas in the military police in Upper Burma, particularly in the Shan States, from 30 to 41 companies. Not only were the Gurkhas more tolerant of the harsher climate in the hills but they were also rice-eaters, and would thus save the government the considerable cost of atta, daal, and ghee rations.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ From Major H. Parkin, Officiating, Inspector-General of Police, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma – No. 2042-Q -176, dated 13 June 1900, in *BBHP* of July 1900: IOLR/P/5801.

By the end of the 1880s, compensation was seen as a suitable way to feed the military police in the larger towns where food could easily be procured, while the rations system, however expensive, was to be applied to the remaining battalions in Upper Burma. In the event of a food shortage, which usually occurred towards the end of the month, each Battalion Commander had to obtain adequate food through other channels, through direct purchases from local suppliers. A sole reliance on food rations from the Supply Department often created shortages for battalions stationed in distant hills. To give an example, in Yamethin, south of Mandalay, the government was driven to meet the high cost of food during the dry months, due to a break in the delivery of food rations; the Indians were, it was reported, 'left for a month without rations so they had to pay much greater rate for their supplies.'²⁶

The Police Supply and Clothing Department

There were further difficulties. The military police preferred to serve in those districts where food was cheaper: and most contractors refused to supply food to battalions garrisoned in the remote hills at the same flat (contract) rate as for those in the plains. The Supply Department was established to obtain and deliver rations and to distribute clothing, arms and accoutrements. Later, the functions of the department expanded, to include the supply of arms to the military police and the civil police in Lower Burma and, increasingly, the

²⁶ From Major S.H.P. Graves, Officiating Inspector-General of Police, Burma, to the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, No 5059A, dated 27 September 1889, in Index No. 15, *BBHP* of January-April 1890: IOLR/P/3574.

provision of food and arms to boundary commissions, notably the Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission of 1889-90 and the Burma-Chinese Boundary Commission of 1898-1900. The Department underwent many changes over the decades but its primary function remained more or less the same, to undertake the efficient provision of food and other items at as low a cost as possible. It also acquired many other functions, from negotiating contracts with Indian food suppliers to reselling the uniforms of deceased or invalided officers. But its prime purpose was to supply food rations.

With the establishment of the Supply Department, government warehouses were constructed in Mandalay (supplying the Shan States and most of the Kachin Hills) and at Myingyan (for the Chin Hills) to store food supplied by contractors in Mandalay. Battalion commanders would send down their Indian sepoy at regular intervals to take delivery of their rations from either one of the warehouses or from the contractors' wheat mills. The rations were then sent upcountry by boat, rail, bullock cart, or mule to each hill station. In some areas, the transport of food supplies was very limited. In Bhamo and other areas close to the Chinese border, transport during the rainy season was so difficult that it was 'a source of much anxiety, trouble and expense'. Every year, roads between Bhamo and towns such as Sinbo and Mogaung were cut off for six months during the rains. Transport by hired river-boat usually took on average 27 days to reach the eight battalions stationed north of Bhamo. Each battalion was estimated to consume a striking 25 tons of food each month and the cost of transporting food up the river, including the cost of the hired

boat and of extra labour, were as much as 40 rupees per ton.²⁷ The only way to secure an adequate distribution of food in the hills during the rainy season was to supply battalions during the open season, from October to May, for one year in advance in the case of the Chin Hills, and for at least 6 months in advance for other frontier posts.

To reiterate, the establishment of the Supply Department, and in particular the department's commitment to the rations system, was generally regarded as an expensive but necessary cost. It might have been anticipated that, with the extension of the railway (as far as Myitkyina by 1898) and the abolition of many of the more distant military police posts, the expenses of the Supply Department would fall. But this was not the case. Expeditions into previously un-administered territories such as the Kachin Hills and the Upper Chindwin region on the north-west frontier during the early 1890s required reinforcements by military police regiments, and thus incurred increasingly heavy expenses in the supply of rations.²⁸ Towards the end of the same decade, when the area under British administration had been greatly expanded, the work of the department finally reached 'straining point', so much so that extra

²⁷ *Report of the Police Supply and Clothing Department for the year 1889-90*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1891, Supplement to the *Report on the Police Administration, Burma*, for 1889.

²⁸ From the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department – No. 201-3C, dated 6 May 1893, in Proposed permanent retention of the Police Supply and Food Department, and the permanent transfer of the services of Captain Perkins to the Burma Police Department, in *BBHP* of May 1893: IOLR/P/4273.

military police inspectors and officers had to be temporarily appointed to take care of the transport of supplies to distant posts, which 'at times take longer to reach than England.'²⁹

With much time and effort needed to deliver adequate food supplies in such a hostile climate, it was no surprise that the Supply Department came to face another acute problem, that of food deterioration. In late 1897, the government of Burma observed that the value of rations lost or wasted during transportation or storage had increased almost threefold, from around 9,000 rupees in 1896 to 20,000 in 1897.³⁰ The losses were particularly heavy during the rains. That said, the proportion of food rations lost in this way appears to have been comparatively modest. In 1900, for example, food wastage as a proportion of total distributed rations in Upper Burma was just 1.34 percent. There are some examples of food loss as a result of accident, wrongdoing, or neglect.³¹ And while there is little clear evidence of corruption, one event in

²⁹ From Lieutenant-Colonel Peile, to the Chief Secretary, No. 6L, dated Maymyo, 8 June 1898, in Proposed permanent retention of the Police Supply and Clothing Department.

³⁰ Extract from the Proceedings of the Lieutenant-Governor of Burma in the Police Department – No. 1R-11, dated 18 November 1897, in Resolution on the Report on the Police Supply and Clothing Department for the year 1896-97, in *BBHP* of November 1897: IOLR/P/5103.

³¹ Fresh wheat was imported from India through Rangoon or Mandalay and was milled into wheat flour or atta at the contractors' mills in Mandalay. Often fresh wheat or wheat flour were kept in the contractors' godowns for a long period during the rainy season because many military police posts and even headquarters were cut off. This resulted in deterioration. In

1901 is perhaps worth noting. In April 1901, the Supply Department received a complaint from the Chin Hills and Myitkyina battalions that an astonishing 25,741.5 lbs. of ghee, with a value of almost 12,000 rupees, had been pronounced unfit for consumption. The contaminated ghee was said to be 'cleverly adulterated', and had apparently slipped through inspection before being delivered to the two battalions.³² The police blamed a dubious contractor: 'The loss occurred at the very end of the contract, so much so, that the contractor's bills were actually paid before the mistake was discovered.'³³ It would appear that the contractor was not pursued by the authorities. But an attempt was made to obtain food supplies locally to avoid further risks of deterioration during storage.

Food deterioration became a significant problem. In the long journey from India to Mandalay (via Rangoon) wheat and atta were liable to deteriorate in

1900, atta with a value of 3,247 rupees had to be destroyed in Mogok: 20,000 lbs. of wheat were damaged by weevils in Mandalay; and other rations to the value of 2,389 rupees were declared by the Civil Surgeon to be unsuitable for consumption. Extract from the proceedings of the Government of Burma in the Police Department, No. 1R-11, dated 30 October 1900, in *Report of the Police Supply and Clothing Department for the year 1899-1900*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1901.

³² From the Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma to the Inspector-General of Police, Burma, No.737-3C-1, dated 20 March 1901, in *BBHP* of April 1901: IOLR/P/6037.

³³ From Major H. Parkin, Officiating Inspector-General of Police, Burma, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, No. 104-1R.-11, dated 10 April 1900, in *Ibid.*

the extreme heat and humidity of Burma. In later years, whole wheat rather than atta was imported and then ground in the contractors' mills at Mandalay. But the mills struggled to keep pace with the demand being generated by the military police in Upper Burma.

After decades of importing wheat from India, in the early 20th century, the crop was finally grown in some areas of Upper Burma, namely Ava, Sagaing, Monywa, Myingyan and parts of Shwebo. In addition, in 1905 experiments were undertaken in Kengtung and the Southern Shan States to encourage the local population to grow wheat, the government providing seeds and agricultural experts. The increase in wheat production in Upper Burma not only reduced the government's reliance on imported atta purchased from large contractors but, for the first time, gave the Supply Department the ability to negotiate crop prices with the contractors.³⁴ The police were confident that the production of wheat in Burma would meet all their demand, and therefore announced that the force was prepared to accept only Burmese wheat. Indian wheat, it was claimed, would be purchased only in special circumstances, only when the Deputy Commissioners in wheat-growing districts declared that local supplies would be insufficient.

³⁴ From Lieutenant-Colonial Peile to the Chief Secretary, No. 2546-1W-6, dated 22 December 1904, in 'Wheat-grinding in Jails for the Military Police. Rates charged by the Prisons Department for cleaning and grinding wheat for the Military Police, until further orders, to be ten annas for every hundred pounds. Contract to be given to the Prisons Department to supply flour to the Chindwin and Shwebo Battalion in the year 1906-07, as an experiment,' in *BBHP* of April 1905: IOLR/P/6977.

As a consequence of the increase in wheat production in Burma, a police initiative was launched, as early as 1892, under which the Prisons Department, using prison labour, would grind wheat for the police. Wheat was, as usual, purchased from the contractor by the Supply Department and delivered to the prisons. In the early 1900s, the rate charged by the Prisons Department for wheat-grinding was as low as 12 annas per 100 lbs. of wheat, and the packing and transportation costs for 100 lbs. of atta were no more than 8 annas (the total consumption of atta by the military police in Upper Burma in 1903-04 was 4,145,667 lbs.).³⁵ The scheme met with some success, not least because it provided 'a very useful form of hard labour'.³⁶ Yet it was admitted that wheat-grinding by prisoners was expensive, and the basic grinding utensils, presumably ordinary quern stones as opposed to the large water- or steam-powered mill stones, caused considerable losses to the wheat. Even so, wheat-grinding by prisoners continued to be a major source of atta for the police force. Both the prisons and the police saw benefits in this arrangement. The Prisons Department welcomed an important source of additional income; and the police continued to emphasize the defects of the alternative, the contract system:

³⁵ From Lieutenant-Colonel H. Parkin, Officiating Inspector-General of Police, Burma, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, No. 1232-1E.-13, dated 5 August 1904, in Retention of the Burma Police Supply and Clothing Department for a further period of five years (1904-1909). Report on wheat-grinding in Jails, in *BBHP* of October 1904: IOLR/P/6739.

³⁶ From Major Peile to Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Burma, No. 178, dated 22 April 1892, in Proposals regarding the retention of the Department of Police Supply and Clothing in Burma after the 31 March 1892, in Index No. 1, *BBHP* of May 1892: IOLR/P/4038.

The disadvantages of contract system are that in order to make as much profit as possible no particular attention is paid to the quality and age of the wheat used in the steam flour mills. The wheat not being subject to inspection before grinding may contain a large quantify of foreign and deleterious matter which it is difficult to detect by mere inspection of the atta once it is ground into fine flour.³⁷

Food contract: the monopoly

In the mid-1900s, domestic wheat production was still below consumption in Upper Burma. And later in the decade, with constantly rising demand, the shortfall was still greater. In 1907-08, consumption by the Bhamo and Upper Chindwin battalions alone was 881,700 lbs.: but it was reported that the maximum atta production of the Prisons Department was just 327,000 lbs.³⁸ The deficit could be made good only by the contractors. But the largest contractor, one Bhugwan Das, refused to meet the government's needs. To understand this refusal, it is necessary to explore the relationship between the Supply Department and the local Indian contractors.

³⁷ From Lieutenant-Colonel E.P. Frenchman, Inspector-General of Prisons, Burma, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma – No. 8926-43, dated 6 October 1904, in Retention of the Burma Police Supply and Clothing Department for a further period of five years (1904-1909). Report on wheat-grinding in Jails, in *BBHP* of October 1904.

³⁸ Lieutenant-Colonial Peile to Chief Secretary of Burma, No. 3955-1W-3, dated 21 March 1907 in Wheat-grinding in Jails for the Military Police. Revised rates for the supply of wheat by Contractors, in *BBHP* of January 1908: IOLR/P/7503.

Major beneficiaries of the posting of thousands of Indian military police to Upper Burma in the 1880s were the Indian food contractors based in Rangoon and Mandalay. During the pacification of Upper Burma, the regular soldiers and the military police were provisioned through contracts with suppliers such as Bhugwan Das. Even before the establishment of the Supply Department, Bhugwan Das had managed to secure more contracts than any other contractor to supply atta to the military police. This allowed him to charge high prices for his goods, above the so-called bazaar rates. Bhugwan Das, who had the title *Rai Bahadur*, a British Indian title equivalent to an OBE, was clearly a major Indian merchant who managed to secure contracts with the police and indeed with other branches of government every year. As his relationship with the Police Supply Department grew closer from the 1880s into the 1890s, Bhugwan Das could easily drive out his competitors.³⁹

Nonetheless, at the end of the 1890s, food contracts were no longer restricted to Bhugwan Das. Smaller contractors had begun to emerge and, as described earlier, the domestic production of wheat, though in its infancy, had partially replaced the atta previously purchased from Bhugwan Das. But Bhugwan Das re-emerged in 1907 when crop failures, not only of wheat, hit many areas across Asia, from Assam to Japan and in Burma itself. Many traders were badly hit. The official correspondence of the Supply Department throughout 1907 was dominated by petitions from small contractors asking for relief. Ismail Sulimanjee Sedoo, a small supplier of Indian food from Myingyan,

³⁹ From Major Peile to the Chief Secretary, No. 6L, Maymyo, 8 June 1898, in Proposed permanent retention of the Police Supply and Clothing Department.

explained in his petition to the Police Supply Department that the price of wheat in Burma had risen to 325 and then 415 rupees in 1907 and 1908 respectively, compared to 275 rupees in the previous year. He therefore asked if his contract rate could be increased from 25 lbs. to 22 lbs. per rupee.⁴⁰

The petitions from small suppliers for an 'act of kindness', as exemplified by Sedoo's letter, revealed a further problem that the military police in Upper Burma were facing during the more peaceful years of the early 20th century, the issue of securing wheat at all during periods of severe scarcity. The police contract rate, inclusive of transport and delivery expenses, was set through a process of tendering. This government rate was substantially lower than the market rate. But most small contractors, despite claims of losses, adhered to that rate in order to secure long-term food contracts. This was the only way they could compete with the larger contractors such as Bhugwan Das. The Supply Department was not entirely comfortable with the monopoly in food deliveries, for arguably it increased the prices it paid for Indian foodstuffs. The department therefore sought greater competition, as seen in the concessions it made during periods of shortage to small contractors. In the concession given to Sedoo, the government accepted 22 lbs. of wheat instead of 25 lbs, per

⁴⁰ From W.H.A. St. J. Leeds, Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, to the Inspector General of Police, No. 583-3C-5, dated 3 June 1907, in *BBHP* of January 1908: IOLR/P/7503.

rupee.⁴¹ Of course, Bhugwan Das protested, and stepped up his efforts to drive out the small contractors.

Unfortunately, there are no records to show how these rivalries between the large and small contractors played out. But presumably, with the return of normal agricultural and trading conditions, the Supply Department sought to resume its previous practice of purchasing wheat and atta from more reliable suppliers at agreed rates. But at the same time, there is no doubt that Indian foodstuffs were becoming more difficult to obtain, and therefore the Supply Department was being forced to agree to increases in the prices it paid after the contract rate had been agreed by tender. In 1909, a merchant from Mandalay, Shrewdutroy Gunshamdass, reminded the government that it should adhere to the contract rate once agreed:

Contractors do always before tendering, take into consideration the probable rise or fall in prices and if rates are subsequently raised during the pendency of contracts, it will result in unfair treatment to other tenderers, who had they known that the rates will be revised if market prices rise, would have tendered at much lower rates than they did. The policy hitherto pursued has been a fair and reasonable one to the general body of Contractors and it is a principle of good business that when a contract is

⁴¹ Endorsement by E.W.B. Whiting, Officiating Superintendent, Police Supplies, Burma, No. 988-E, dated 3 July 1907, in *Ibid.*

entered into, the supply is purchased in an easy market and stored for delivery whenever required.⁴²

The Upper Burma Military Police, an overwhelmingly Indian institution, were a major element in the racial division between Indians and Burmese in the colonial police force, and also between the colonial police and the indigenous population. The core premise in the police administration of colonial Burma was that the lawless state of the country and the rebellious character of the Burmese, as seen by the British, made local recruitment, at least among the Burmans, a poor option. Consequently, the military police, a force with a strong martial spirit and strict military training, would consist only of non-Burman recruits, although in later years, in the face of financial pressures, a number of units of Chin and Kachin military police were created.

But as this chapter has demonstrated, the Indian domination of the military police came at a considerable cost, both financial and in terms of administrative commitment. Simply to provide provisions, and in particular food rations, to the Indian military police in distant posts in the hills, was a huge challenge for the authorities. This problem would be held close to the heart of the police administration, not only that of the military police but also that of the Burma police as a whole. That the British colonial administration remained committed to the recruitment of Indians into that force reflected the

⁴² Petition from Shewdutroy Gunshamdass, Trader and Contractor of Mandalay, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, dated 10 November 1908, in *BBHP* of January 1909: IOLR/P/8070.

colonial belief that the Indian police were essential to the maintenance of law and order in Burma, more specifically to the task of pacification of Upper Burma and in the subsequent expeditions to open up new frontiers.

Police and Crime

The unusual prevalence of crime in Burma was a subject of much debate by the British colonial administration from the days following the conquest of Upper Burma in 1885. Of course, crime is a social construct. ‘Hegemonic’ law-makers and penal codes are the tools that help a colonial regime, for example, to define acts of rebelliousness as ‘criminal’ and groups of defiant people as ‘criminals’.¹ Thus in colonial Burma, crime was to a degree defined by the British administration. Following the annexation of Upper Burma in the 1880s, when colonial society in Burma was still in its infancy and when capital accumulation was yet to affect deeply the lives of ordinary villagers, the British administration focused on violent crime, particularly organized violence, as in dacoities and gang robberies.

With the rapid expansion of rice cultivation in Lower Burma and the boom in rice exports, followed by what Michael Adas has called ‘the closing of the rice frontier’ from the early 20th century, land values and agrarian

¹ “Delinquency and the Penitentiary Systems in Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Deviants and the Abandoned in French Society: Selections from the Annales Economies, Societes, Civilisations*, Vol. 4, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (Baltimore, 1978), p. 219, quoted in Anand A. Yang, “Issues and Themes in the Study of Historical Crime and Criminality: passages to the social history of British India,” in Anand A. Yang (ed.), *Crime and Criminality in British India*. Tucson, Arizona: The Association for Asian Studies, 1985, p. 1.

indebtedness rose.² And in that context, in the 1920s attempts were made by the colonial authorities to examine the circumstances that apparently drove ordinary Burmans to commit crime. In the previous century, generally speaking, criminality was perceived to be an inherent characteristic of the Burman (see Chapter 2). Although sometimes driven by economic conditions, crimes such as dacoity, serious robbery, and murder were seen as a reflection of the administrative incompetence of the Konbaung monarchs, and the migration into British territory of bad characters from Upper Burma.³ Indeed, with improved communications, notably along the Irrawaddy, crime became far more mobile.⁴

The 1923 Committee: the causes of crime and the effectiveness of the police

Early in 1923, an *ad hoc* committee, consisting of 2 British and 5 Burmese government officials and non-officials, was appointed to 'enquire into the

² Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852-1941*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1974, pp. 128-9.

³ Extract from the Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner, Burma, in the Judicial Department – No. 172P, dated 25 May 1889, in Chief Commissioner's Resolution on the report of the Committee appointed to consider the re-organisation of the Lower Burma Police, Judicial Department Circular No. 17 of 1889, in Index No. 15, *BBHP* of May 1889: IOLR/P/3553.

⁴ From the Officiating Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Burma, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department – No. 339-7P.-3, dated 12 January 1895, in Proposed establishment of a special detective branch of the police service in Burma, *BBHP* of January 1895: IOLR/P/4678.

causes of violent crimes in villages across the country and to report as to what practical measures the Government should take for the prevention of these crimes.⁵ A report was produced using two main kinds of material, interviews, and a questionnaire sent to government officials and non-officials across Lower and Upper Burma. The committee received some 372 completed questionnaires, and obtained 161 accounts, including interviews conducted in many parts of the country, from Moulmein in the south to Mandalay in the north. By attempting to examine what actually fanned the flame of lawlessness in the province, often seen by the British as the most criminal province in British India, the committee placed special emphasis on the current village organization.⁶ The report also examined the role of the police, and asked whether their generally recognized inefficiency had contributed to the increase in crime.

Table 4: Statistics of Violent Crime, 1913-1922

-----	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922
Murder (including attempts and culpable homicide)	626	612	659	661	675	664	745	787	803	771
Dacoity	185	128	196	218	194	189	234	294	333	364
Robbery	525	480	497	494	539	513	654	772	740	824
Robbery and dacoity together	709	608	693	712	733	702	888	1,066	1,073	1,188

⁵ *Report of the Crime Enquiry Committee* [henceforth RCEC]. Maymyo: Government Branch Press, 1923, p. 1.

⁶ For the colonial view of Burma's criminality, see for example *Report on the Prison Administration of Burma for the Year 1915*, Resolution, p. 2, as quoted in Ian Brown, "A commissioner calls: Alexander Paterson and colonial Burma's prisons," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38 (2007), p. 307.

Source: *Report of the Crime Enquiry Committee*. Maymyo: Government Branch Press, 1923, p. 2.

The above figures indeed suggested a marked increase in violent crime grouped into four categories: murder, dacoity, robbery, and a combination of robbery and dacoity. The latter was the most widespread form of violent crime in this period, while robbery and murder came second and third respectively. However, not all categories of crime had substantially increased over the 10 years under examination. For example, from 1913 to 1922, the figures for murder had fluctuated but not increased consistently. This chapter will first explore those factors perceived by the 1923 committee to be the causes of the increase in violent crime from the late 1910s to the early 1920s.

The committee argued that the causes of the growth in crime could be grouped into domestic factors and influences from abroad. To many Burmese and Europeans living in Burma, the rise in crime since 1919 was significantly a global phenomenon. In Burma, cultivators and labourers had been heavily affected by the slump in rice prices during the war and the general shortage of imported goods. Many had then suffered from the rapid rise in paddy prices, and the soaring cost of living, in the post-war years. Thus Burma had been hit by the economic disruption of the war. Moreover, in a more practical term, it was argued, the recent growth in 'luxurious' consumption and the subsequent rise of materialism in the country had increased the number of looters and dacoit gangs, for the consumption of foreign luxuries had fueled greed and then crime. There were further arguments and evidence:

Several recently convicted dacoits whom we interviewed ascribed their participation in the offences to the insufficiency of their season's wages to carry them and those dependent on them over the slack period following the harvest, when there was no demand for their labour. Their wages, payable in kind had in fact generally been consumed before the end of the working season in advances taken at exorbitant *sapabe* rates.⁷

It was also believed that crime and the growing sense of rebellion among local political figures reflected in part the spread of political ideas from Europe and India. That growing hostility was leading to the 'gradual waning of the authority of the headman'. In that sense the committee now

⁷ RCEC, p. 2. The workers were paid in rice (perhaps with a little cash too) in advance, and most had eaten all the rice before the end of the season, and were thus destitute. [Cited in U Hoke Sein, *The Universal Burmese-English-Pali Dictionary*. Rangoon: Myitzythaka Sarpay, 1981, and Denise Bernot, *Dictionnaire Birman-Français*. Paris: SELAP, 1978-92; this explanation was kindly provided by Mr. John Okell]. Cheng Siok-Hwa described *sapabe* (or *sabape*) in greater detail: 'This was more of an advance sale than a loan. The rate was expressed in terms of the number of rupees advanced in the expectation of a repayment of 100 local baskets of paddy. Goods obtained on credit from village shopkeepers were sometimes paid for in paddy at harvest. These assumed a *sabape* character because the goods were valued at cash prices and the payment was made on *sabape* terms. The interest rates worked out to about 8 to 15 per cent per month. ... Sabape loans ... were used everywhere. Because of their exorbitant interest rates they were taken by people whose credit-worthiness was so low that they could not get loans on other terms. These loans were mostly used for small requirements of food and seed and to provide money to lend to labourers. The hired labourer obtained these loans frequently from the employer and the village shopkeeper. ... This type of loan became very important after 1930 when professional moneylenders, especially the Chettyars, greatly restricted their activities due to the trade depression' Cheng Siok-Hwa, *The Rice Industry of Burma*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967, pp. 173, 175.

questioned whether the village system itself, after its largest re-organization in the late 1880s, was an efficient tool to combat crime.⁸

Although the nationwide increase in crime could be connected partly to the effects of the war, there were also domestic factors. Important here were the vices of opium, gambling, and alcohol, and the alleged inefficiencies of the police. But these alleged causes of crime did not particularly convince this committee and were not emphasized in its report. Opium consumption, to give an example, was unlikely to have caused the leap in violent crime because consumption in fact appeared to have fallen. In addition it was available only in licensed shops.⁹ In the eyes of the, presumably devout, Buddhist committee members, alcohol was probably the worst evil of Burma's colonial society, even if there were no figures on alcohol consumption:

the [drinking] habit has a very serious influence on the criminal statistics of the province, both through its direct effect in the numerous murder and hurt cases arising from drunken brawls, and through its indirect effects from the evil associations and general demoralization which it promotes.

And again,

⁸ RCEC, 1923, p. 3.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 4, 13, and U Ohn Kyaw, *Lecture on Crime in Burma from 1899 to 1935*. Rangoon: The New Burma Press, 1937, pp. 4-5. I am grateful to my long-time friend and colleague, Noriyuki Osada, who kindly sent the latter material to me.

... in view of the strong and widespread feeling which has been exhibited by Burman witnesses against the use of alcoholic drink, we are agreed that total prohibition [of alcohol] for Burmans should be regarded as the ultimate aim.¹⁰

But for the government to eliminate alcohol shops and ban alcohol consumption was surely impractical, not least because it would hit the revenues hard: license fees from distillery spirits, *tari*-tree tax, and various duties on liquor generated for government more than 3.3 million rupees a year.¹¹ But while it was difficult to discourage or prohibit alcohol consumption, indeed cheap alcohol was distributed to the military police and to the troops,¹² the committee proposed to ban licensed liquor shops in villages and small towns, or to restrict spirit consumption to shop premises.¹³ Another possible measure to curb crime allegedly arising from excessive use of alcohol was to include preventive provisions in the Excise Act, as already existed in the Opium Act and the Gambling Act of 1899 and then 1909.¹⁴ Preventive provisions immediately increased the number of

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹² In 1922, while the total value of tax obtained from 'foreign' liquor, i.e. European-imported whisky, beer, ale, rum, was in decline, the government issued 891 gallons of 'foreign spirits' at 'a privileged rate': *Report on the Excise Administration in Burma during the Year 1922-23*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1924, pp. 14-15, and Appendix, Form XIV-A.

¹³ RCEC, p. 12.

¹⁴ RCEC, pp. 13, Annex 1, p. 7.

arrests but simultaneously reduced the number of convictions, at least in certain areas, usually notorious ones, such as Tharrawaddy.

Gambling, sometimes referred to as gaming, was probably the only *a-pyit* (misdeed) from the list of vices that was unlikely to cause direct physical or mental harm.¹⁵ However, according to the 1923 report, gambling and the gambling habit drove the Burmese to 'a certain amount of crime against property and to occasional personal violence as a result of disputes.'¹⁶ The committee also saw gambling as having 'harmful moral effects', and perhaps having created more poverty among the already impoverished working class. The colonial government had attempted to curb local gambling *waing* (circles) in the Lower Burma (Act III of 1867), then the Burma Gambling Act, 1884 and 1899, later amended.¹⁷ Gambling remained one of the most prevalent and simple entertainments inside and outside the village. Since it was therefore hard to monitor, the 1923 committee proposed to amend a section of the Gambling Act to increase the power of police officers (sub-inspectors or more senior, and headmen) to raid gambling houses and arrest without warrants from a magistrate. It also proposed stiffer penalties for those involved in gambling, especially owners of illegal gaming-houses or organizers of gambling *waings*.

¹⁵ The definition of gambling here embraces games prevalent among villagers and the working class. Examples include the famous *ti*. It did not include bookmaking or gambling at the racecourse which was considered by the committee to be 'no more likely to be productive of harm.' *RCEC*, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Burma Gambling Act, 1899: IOLR/L/PJ/6/501, File 275.

The 1923 committee and the public in general believed that the audacity of dacoit gangs was linked to chronic defects in village administration in Burma. The success of the police in Burma relied almost entirely on cooperation from the village headmen. Although most headmen were, to a certain degree, reliable, some were hopeless, as noted in an excise report from Maungmya in 1922: 'Headmen are mostly apathetic. In some villages headmen are related to trespassers against the Excise and Opium Laws and in a number of cases are under financial obligations to the Chinese shopkeeper who is the supplier of drugs to the villagers.'¹⁸ The unsettled condition of village administration in Burma in the 1880s has already been discussed in Chapter 3. But whatever the difficulties, it was one of the most significant elements in policing in colonial Burma or, as pointed out in the 1923 report, 'the bed-rock on which success in dealing with crime and criminals rest in Burma.'¹⁹

It was believed that the problem lay in various flaws in the Village Act, and in the inefficiency of the headmen as they became isolated from and unrepresentative of their village communities. In other words, the re-organization of the village administration in the late 1880s, its resurrection, had failed to provide effective policing, as had been hoped. Various reports showed that some headmen were involved in illegal activities such as drug dealing.²⁰ Indeed, the headmen were misplaced, occupying a middle

¹⁸ *Report on the Excise Administration in Burma, 1922-23*, p. 29.

¹⁹ RCEC, p. 5.

²⁰ *Report on the Excise Administration in Burma, 1922-23*, p. 29.

position between the sophisticated and distant colonial world and simplistic and naïve village life. One initial solution would be to release the headman from being the sole representative of the government in the village for, over generations, this had often caused jealousy and paranoia among the other influential villagers. And indeed the 1923 committee recommended that the headman should 'cease to be the principal figure of a village community.'²¹ The committee explained the problems that arose from the headman's monopoly on power as the sole government official in the village. First it loosened the relationship between the headman and the villagers. This was highly dangerous for the government, due to the headman's significant role as a revenue collector. Without a close tie to his villagers, the collection of revenue would be rendered more difficult. Then the village headman was seen by villagers as a puppet, used by the colonial government only when crime was a concern. The headman's prestige and status declined, and village life disintegrated: increasingly, more villagers left in search of money and jobs in the big cities.

A proposal was made to allow villagers to elect their own headman instead of the headman being chosen only from among the established village order. The position would be permanent but assessed. The village committee, including the headman, would be empowered to select good ten-house *gaungs* who would take a key role in surveillance. In other words, the government was now attempting to integrate, rather than decentralize, the village administration. Village representatives would now be required to act transparently. Moreover, village headmen in the same

²¹ RCEC, p. 6.

area would be encouraged to establish headmen's associations that would allow headmen and government officials, such as the police, to exchange information and ensure consistency in administration and policing.²² A second level of local association known as the village association or *athin* would also be founded to encourage villagers to cooperate with the government.²³ In order to improve the village administration, it was necessary to restore the villagers' trust in the government, and to engage their enthusiasm for the suppression of crime by appointing village committees to take responsibility for their own affairs.

Not all parts of Burma experienced the same level of crime. Crime committed by dacoit gangs and marauders from Upper Burma was common in Lower Burma. Because of its distinctive geography of thick jungle and low hills, it was impossible to patrol, no matter how many recruits were employed in the force. Indeed the nature of crime in Lower and Upper Burma was quite different. Usually, it was the impoverished Upper Burmans who looted the more fertile and prosperous Lower Burma. Whether an area was plagued with crime depended upon many factors. One of the primary considerations was location. Districts with vast jungle tracts or close to the Siamese border, for instance, were more likely to attract criminals. Those districts in the lower part of Lower Burma, including Amherst, Tavoy, and Mergui, as pointed out by the 1923 committee, attracted more criminals because their villages were hidden in the jungle. Dacoit gangs close to the eastern border could escape into the

²² Ibid., pp. 6-7.

²³ Ibid., p. 8.

Siamese territory. The crime committee paid particular attention to the Irrawaddy delta, arguing that crime there had increased because of the disintegration of the village administration.²⁴ No further explanation was provided. Indeed the committee was often imprecise in its analysis: for the Magwe Division, it simply concluded that 'it is hardly possible to distinguish one of the main causes [for the increased crime] above suggested as more prominent than another.'²⁵

Success in suppressing crime in the village would depend not only on the residents and the headman but also, of course, on the police. However, as argued in other chapters, the performance of the police force in colonial Burma was not always reliable. The chronic inefficiency among police officials and the rank-and-file, and in particular their poor relationship with villages, was once again heard in the crime enquiry committee. The poor performance of the detective branch was a particular concern. And, as always, there were the issues of low pay and the poor quality of recruits.

Unlike the army, the subordinate police in Burma never attracted good recruits. It had long been recognized that police pay was so low that that expenditure on the Burma police fell far short of that required for such a

²⁴ J.S. Furnivall, *An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma*. Rangoon: People's Literature Committee & House, 3rd ed., 1957, pp. m-n.

²⁵ RCEC, pp. 4-5.

prosperous province.²⁶ Rates of pay were occasionally raised, as shown immediately below.

Table 5: Comparative Salary of Subordinate Police in Burma, 1920

<i>Ranks</i>	<i>Sub-ranks</i>	<i>Old rate (per month)</i>	<i>New rate (per month)</i>
Inspectors	1 st grade	Rs. 250	Rs. 175-10-295
	2 nd grade	Rs. 200	
	3 rd grade	Rs. 175	
	4 th grade	Rs. 150	
Sub-Inspectors	1 st grade	Rs. 100	1 st grade Rs. 125 2 nd grade Rs. 85-3-100 3 rd grade Rs. 60-2-80
	2 nd grade	Rs. 80	
	3 rd grade	Rs. 70	
	4 th grade	Rs. 60	
	5 th grade	Rs. 50	
	6 th grade	Rs. 40	
Sergeants		Rs. 100	Rs. 100-5-100
Head Constables	1 st grade	Rs. 25	Rs. 40
	2 nd grade	Rs. 22-8	Rs. 35
	3 rd grade	Rs. 20	Rs. 30
	4 th grade	N/A	Rs. 25
Constables	On enlistment	Rs. 12	Rs. 17
	After 3 years	Rs. 14	Rs. 19
	After 10 years	Rs. 16	Rs. 21
	After 17 years	Rs. 18	Rs. 23

Source: *Resolution on the Police Administration Report of Burma for the Year 1920*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1921, p. 2

In the first half of the 1920s, police expenditure in Burma amounted to around 13 percent of the total provincial expenditure, similar to that in Bengal and Bihar and Orissa (at 13 and 18 percent respectively). However, the lowest ranks of the police in Bengal received 16-20 rupees per month, although it was proposed to raise the pay to 20-24 rupees (the proposal was

²⁶ *Report of the Burma Police Enquiry Committee 1924*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1924, p. 1.

rejected, nonetheless).²⁷ In the considerably more expensive Burma the police were paid only slightly more. The Rangoon Town police, for example, in 1924, received 22 rupees a month upon enlistment, 23 rupees after 2 years, 24 rupees after 5 years, 25 rupees after 9 years, 26 rupees after 13 years, and 27 rupees after 17 years.²⁸ A policeman could not, remarked the Burma Police Enquiry Committee, 'possibly support himself and his family in comfort on these rates of pay, except perhaps in a few districts, where the cost of living is exceptionally low'.²⁹ While police work required training and discipline, a second or third class constable was paid as little as most coolies in Rangoon and seasonal labourers elsewhere in the Delta. Travel costs and other payments were not usually provided for police officers, making corruption inevitable.

It is interesting to note that historians, unlike the 1923 committee, have seen the causes of surging crime rates in terms of the disintegrative impact of British rule. For example, Cheng Siok-Hwa has argued that job losses, the alienation of agricultural land, and the disintegration of village life were responsible for the persistently high level of crime in British Burma. Cheng, quoting G. E. Harvey, argued that socio-economic change

²⁷ *Report on the Police Administration in the Bengal Presidency for the Year 1927*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1928, Resolution, p. 1; and *Report on the Police Administration in the Bengal Presidency for the Year 1920*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1921, p. 2.

²⁸ *Report of the Burma Police Enquiry Committee 1924*, p. 24.

²⁹ RCEC, pp. 8-9.

contributed considerably to the feeling of rootlessness, which, in turn, was an important cause of crime. Just before the Second World War there were 800 to 1,000 reported murders per year and a large number of other crimes for a population of twelve to thirteen million living in the areas covered by crime statistics. ... Burma under British rule had an unenviable reputation for crime.³⁰

The view of J. R. Andrus on the general increase of crime in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was similar: the 'rice rush' and the opening of the frontier, and the rising number of immigrants from Upper Burma naturally paved the way for conflicts over, for instance, land tenure and wages: there were also household conflicts created by general hardship or increasing competition for work.³¹

The 1923 Crime Enquiry Committee drew attention to the sharp distinction between the near-rampant crime found in rural Burma in the first decades of the 20th century and the apparently low-levels of petty crime that had been a feature of the pre-colonial, more self-sufficient economy. In an interesting lecture given to the Detective School at Insein in the mid-1930s, U Ohn Kyaw also noted the changing face of crime in Burma. He described the *yazawutgaungs* as peace-keepers and saw that life was tranquil under the village's police officers. *Yazawutgaungs* alone could easily handle police work within the village jurisdiction, he argued, because 'there was no such

³⁰ G. E. Harvey, *British Rule in Burma, 1824-1942*. London: Faber and Faber, 1946, pp. 38-40, quoted in Cheng Siok-Hwa, *The Rice Industry of Burma*, p. 163.

³¹ J. R. Andrus, *Burmese Economic Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1948, p. 65.

crimes as we have nowadays.’³² Thus Sir Harcourt Butler, the Governor of Burma, after a brief tour of nine districts in Lower and Upper Burma in 1924, believed that violent crime in Burma was not committed simply by gangs of criminals who saw looting and arson as games and entertainment.³³ Moreover, crime in the early 20th century was no longer just the result of economic hardships and destitution but a consequence of the growing prevalence of vices such as alcohol and gambling, as previously argued by the Crime Enquiry Committee. It also reflected a decay in ethics, ‘the relaxing of old ties and the abandonment of old ideas’ including Buddhism and family values.³⁴

Interestingly, the Governor also pointed to the weakness of the criminal law which, he argued, was ‘progressively in favour of the criminal and against the prosecution.’ From 1920 to 1923, in the nine districts of Lower and Upper Burma toured by the Governor, in only 24 percent of cases were reported crimes prosecuted and convictions secured. In Thayetmyo, there were 75 reported cases of dacoity: 63 cases were sent up for prosecution but in only 12 cases were convictions secured. Similarly, in Myingyan, an Upper Burma town close to Mandalay, 62 cases of dacoity were handled by the police: 50 were prosecuted but in only 2 cases were there successful

³² U Ohn Kyaw, *Lecture on Crime in Burma from 1899 to 1935*, p. 1.

³³ Memorandum on my recent tour, in Confidential note on crime in some districts of Burma by Sir Harcourt Butler, 1924: IOLR/L/PJ/6/1881 File 2406.

³⁴ U Ohn Kyaw, *Lecture on Crime in Burma from 1899 to 1935*, pp. 2-3.

convictions.³⁵ It was also evident that the proportions of prosecutions and convictions had fallen substantially from the beginning of the 20th century. In the same districts combined, the proportion of reported dacoities ending in conviction in 1902, 1912, and 1922 had been 59, 39, and 22 percent respectively.³⁶

The decrease in the proportion of prosecutions, let alone convictions, convinced Sir Harcourt, and the Crime Enquiry Committee before him, that the efficiency of policing in Burma was being undermined by weaknesses in the criminal law. Similarly, the Inspector General of Police questioned the compatibility of British Indian legislation and Burma's judicial system, and the requirement for a high standard of evidence. The Burmese government, in response to an enquiry from the Government of India, recognized the need for revision of the law, in particular, the Habitual Offenders Restriction Act of 1918 and the more controversial Criminal Tribes Act, 1924.³⁷ The deployment of this legislation will be discussed later in this chapter.

³⁵ Confidential note on crime in some districts of Burma by Sir Harcourt Butler.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Copy of a letter No. 485-C-25, dated 30 January 1926, from the Government of Burma (Home & Political Department) to the Government of India, Home Department, in As to increase in crime in Burma during last years & if so, of what nature: IOLR/PJ/6/1922 File 1296.

Habitual criminality

It would appear that the understandings of Cheng, Andrus, and Harvey noted earlier, and indeed the accounts of many colonial officials and scholars before them, were underpinned by a British colonial perception that the Burmese were a highly criminal people. This judgment may have been rooted in the widely held view and legislation regarding criminal tribes in India, and its assumption that there were hereditary criminals, or at least people making a living almost entirely out of crime. The construction of the 'criminal tribes' had existed in British minds since the second half of the 19th century, an understanding that saw crime as a 'generic trait transmitted over generations in a family through parents or ancestors', and hence the concept of an 'hereditary criminal class.'³⁸

Rachel Tolen has suggested that:

Under colonial rule, the constitution of the notion of a criminal caste drew on prevailing discourses about crime, class, and work, as well as on British perceptions about the nature of Indian society. Transforming Indian societies into criminal castes involved the construction of the body of knowledge defining the nature, habits, and characteristics of the criminal castes.³⁹

³⁸ Meena Radhakrishna, *Dishonoured by History: 'Criminal Tribes' and British Colonial Policy*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001, p. 2.

³⁹ Rachel J. Tolen, "Colonizing and transforming the criminal tribesman: the Salvation Army in British India," *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991), p. 106.

Ideally, the criminalization of some races equipped the British with the power to control what were seen as the ultimate causes of crime. Crime was not caused by, for example, alcoholism and economic-oriented problems alone, but rather, the drive to crime was deeply embedded in one's character and in the society in which one lived.

Regarding the relationship between the criminal tribes, social structures, and crime in India, and its roots in both India and Victorian Britain, Meena Radhakrishna has pointed out that:

The Criminal Tribes Act ... had its conceptual origins in local systems and structures and arose out of policies of political control rather than social concern for escalating crime. In the late nineteenth century, there was a renewed interest in, and admiration for the Indian caste system in British administrative and intellectual circles: the criminal tribes seemed to belong to a definable caste of hereditary criminals within the Hindu social system. Though neither the concerned communities, nor 'the Hindus' thought of the matter in these terms, the British nevertheless transfixed these communities into an existing hierarchy. By an extension of the same logic, the communities in question also came to be perceived by the British through the yardstick of both Brahmanical and Victorian notions and norms.⁴⁰

Though individual crime in India was also seen to stem from a hereditary cause, the investing of entire communities with hereditary criminality was radically different in the case of India and Europe. In India it was based not on the notion of genetically transmitted crime, but on crime as a

⁴⁰ Meena Radhakrishna, *Dishonoured by History*, pp. 4-5.

profession passed on from one generation of the criminal caste to another: as a carpenter would pass on his trade to the next generation, hereditary criminal caste members would pass on this profession to their offspring.

Following the British India model, four preventive acts, usually sections of the British Indian criminal law, were employed by the police in Burma: (1) Chapter VIII of the Code of Criminal Procedure: 'Of security for keeping the peace and for good behaviour'; (2) Chapter XIII of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Preventive Action of the Police); (3) Act No. VI of 1924 (An Act to Consolidate the Law Relating to Criminal Tribes), or the Criminal Tribes Act 1924 (the whole of British India); and (4) Burma Act No. II of 1919 (Burma Habitual Offenders Act 1919).⁴¹ The present discussion will primarily deal with the third and fourth pieces of legislation.

The original Criminal Tribes Act was initially deployed in the North-Western Provinces, the Punjab, and Oudh, that is in the northern part of India. The Act underwent several major amendments: first, in 1876, it was extended to Bengal Presidency, then in 1911 to Madras Presidency, and finally, in 1924, to the whole of British India, including Burma. The Habitual Offenders Restriction Act, however, was much narrower in scale and was applied only to the Punjab (in 1918) and subsequently to Burma. The Act was introduced to other parts of India only after British rule, to replace the severely-condemned Criminal Tribes Act, which was abolished almost immediately after independence.

⁴¹ *Manual of Preventive Law 1925*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1925, Preface.

The Criminal Tribes legislation provided 'for the registration, surveillance and control of certain criminal tribes and eunuchs.' The control included the recording of the details of the criminal tribes' activities, place of residence, and occupation.⁴² Two key tools for removing these groups from society were the reformatory settlements or schools, and the system of passes. Members of a notified criminal tribe were relocated to the reformatory settlements, and were obliged to carry a pass which bore their name, residence, the places they could visit, and the period of absence allowed from their current residence.⁴³ The British believed that the criminal traits possessed by certain groups were 'static, timeless and shapeless.' As a province of India, the core ideas of surveillance and disciplinary action against criminal races were imported into Burma without any significant adjustment. The apparatus of social control and surveillance of criminals was implemented from the early 20th century, when village headmen, by law, were obliged to create lists of known criminals, habitual or not, and sent them to the nearest police station. Those on the list then had to report to the police or the headmen, or *gaungs*.⁴⁴ Any overnight absence from the village would have to be reported to the nearest police station. But of course, many active criminals still

⁴² Sanjay Nigum, "A social history of a colonial stereotype: the criminal tribes and castes of Uttar Pradesh, 1871-1930" (PhD diss., University of London, 1988), p. 7.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Criminal Investigation Department Manual, Part IV*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1923, pp. 13-15.

roamed the countryside undetected and were presumably not included in the list.

In fact the British did not see the Burmans as being a criminal race, as was typically understood for the 'criminal tribes' in India, or see criminality being passed on from generation to generation. Rather, the Burmans were described by British officials as 'the most engaging people in the Empire,' or 'the most dignified and unassuming people.'⁴⁵ Crime in Burma was usually portrayed by the police as being committed by dangerous gangs of criminals that ostensibly challenged the order sought by British rule. But none of these individuals, or very few of them, had hereditary relationships to crime. Their drive to crime was not generic but was often triggered by immediate causes such as economic hardships or simply a grudge. It seems that the 'criminal tribe' discourse in Burma employed a generically broad term that did not connote a hereditary relationship with crime: the term 'criminal tribe' was mostly associated with 'gang crime.'⁴⁶ Generally speaking, the police in Burma saw criminals as individuals rather than as part of criminal castes. In other words, Burmese dacoit gangs were composed of impoverished peasants or millenarian figures from different parts of the same district or division. They were not bound together by caste but shared the same hardships, spiritual beliefs, and impoverishment.

⁴⁵ Maurice Collis, *Trials in Burma*. London: Penguin Books, 1945, p. 52.

⁴⁶ *Pamphlet of Instructions for the Working of the Habitual Offenders Restriction Act (Burma Act No. II of 1919) by Police Officers*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1922, p. 11.

Although the idea of criminal tribes and inherited criminality was not as widely accepted in Burma, the British there still attempted to register 'criminal tribes'. In 1918 there was a proposal under section 3 of the Criminal Tribes Act, 1911, to declare every person belonging to the Gyaungwaing and Yogwa-Kyeinbaik gangs, residing in the Rangoon, Hanthawaddy, and Insein Districts, to be part of a criminal tribe. The Commissioner of Pegu Division, Lieutenant-Colonel O.J. Obbard, claimed that the gangs were 'addicted to the systematic commission of dacoity.'⁴⁷ After the declaration, the district magistrates of Rangoon, Hanthawaddy, and Insein were directed to register the members of the gang within their districts under section 4 of the Criminal Tribes Act. Additionally, between 1919 and 1922, 9 more gangs, most of whom were natives of Lower Burma, were declared criminal tribes. These were the only documented registrations of a criminal tribe in British Burma. Altogether 376 criminals were proscribed under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1911.⁴⁸

Before the enforcement of the amended Criminal Tribes Act in 1911, only sections 1 (Commencement and Local Extent) and 20 of the original Criminal Tribes Act was extended to Burma.⁴⁹ The significance of the

⁴⁷ Confidential Proceedings (Police), July 1918: IOLR/P/CONF/38.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; *Criminal Investigation Department Manual Part IV*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1923, pp. 32-42.

⁴⁹ Section 20 of the Criminal Tribes Act (Act No. XXVII of 1871): 'Any person registered under the provisions of this Act, who is found in any part of British India, beyond the limits so prescribed for his residence, without such pass as may be required by the said rules, or in a place or at a time not permitted by the conditions of his pass, or who escapes

amended Criminal Tribes Act to Burma initially derived from section 20, which granted increased powers to the Local Government to restrict the movement of proscribed criminal tribes, including the enforcement of the pass, disciplinary, and reformatory system.⁵⁰ Other sections of the Criminal Tribes Act, used in India, covered other individuals such as eunuchs or *sadhus* (yogi) who earned a living almost entirely from begging and sometimes stealing. Section 20 of the act simply strengthened the existing preventive law [alongside Chapters VIII (Of Security for Keeping the Peace and Good Behaviour) and XIII (Preventive Action of the Police) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, the most important section of which was section 110 (of Chapter VIII)]. It was through the use of section 20 of the Criminal Tribes Act, and the increasing recognition of section 110 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, that we begin to see a significant role for the civil police, the military police, and the village police.⁵¹ While the police

from a reformatory settlement, may be arrested without warrant by any police-officer or village-watchman, and taken before a Magistrate, who on proof of the facts, shall order him to be removed to the district in which he ought to have resided, or to the reformatory settlement from which he has escaped (as the case may be), there to be dealt with according to the rules under this Act for the time being in force. The rules for the time being in force for the transmission of prisoners shall apply to all persons removed under this section: Provided that an order from the Local Government or from the Inspector General of Prisons shall not be necessary for the removal of such persons.,' John Marriott and Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *Britain in India Vol.I*. London: Piking & Chatto, 2006, pp. 235-6.

⁵⁰ *Criminal Investigation Department Manual Part IV*, p. 7

⁵¹ Section 110 of the Code of Criminal Procedure: 'Whenever a Presidency Magistrate, District Magistrate, Sub-divisional Magistrate or a Magistrate of the first class specially

were active in crime control and surveillance, together with village headmen, they were increasingly responsible for registering criminals, alleged criminals, or just bad characters. A number of British officials believed that the Criminal Tribes Act was a more humane measure because none of the registered criminals was virtually imprisoned. They would be 'educated' and 'corrected' in specially founded schools designed to eradicate their criminal behaviour.⁵² The passing of the Criminal Tribes Act and the subsequent registration of around 143 criminal tribes in India

empowered in this behalf by the Local Government receives information that any person within the local limits of his jurisdiction – (a) is by habit a robber, house-breaker, thief or *forgery*; or (b) is by habit a receiver of stolen property knowing the same to have been stolen; or (c) habitually protects or harbours thieves or aids in the concealment or disposal of stolen property; or (d) habitually commits or attempts to commit, or abets the commission of the offence of kidnapping, abduction, extortion or cheating or mischief, or any offence punishable under Chapter XII of the Indian Penal Code or under Section 489A, Section 489B, Section 489C, or Section 489D of that Code; or (e) habitually commits, or attempts to commit, or abets the commission of, offences involving a breach of the peace; or (f) is so desperate and dangerous as to render his being at large without security hazardous to the community, such Magistrate may, in manner hereinafter provided, require such person to show cause why he should not be ordered to execute a bond, with sureties, for his good behaviour for such period, not exceeding three years, as the Magistrate thinks fit to fix.' *Manual of Preventive Law 1925*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1925, p. 20-21.

⁵² While the majority of British officials eagerly denied the harmful impact of the act upon communities declared to be criminal, Jawaharlal Nehru called the entire system 'monstrous'. Meena Radhakrishna, *Dishonoured by History*, pp. 22-23, 227.

resulted in the establishment of reformatory settlements there.⁵³ But circumstances in Burma were different. There was no 'reformatory' settlement except one at Paukkaung in Prome District. Nonetheless, it was soon closed due to lack of funds. Transportation was considered by British officials in Burma to be more effective, for transporting criminals, habitual or not, to other village tracts would, it was argued, solve the problem of overcrowded prisons and also gave the criminal 'a chance of earning an honest livelihood.'⁵⁴

Even though the preventive laws in Burma were intended to be vigorously implemented and were regarded as of invaluable benefit in enhancing vigilance against crime, other legislation (in addition to the Criminal Tribes Act) also caused much debate within the administration.⁵⁵ Modelled on the Restriction of Habitual Offenders (Punjab) Act, 1918, the Habitual Offenders Act in Burma was known as the Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act, 1919 (henceforth BHORA). This act shared many similarities with the Criminal Tribes Act and Section 110 of the Criminal Procedure Code but in essence differed quite considerably. BHORA consisted of 18 sections for 'restricting the movements of habitual offenders

⁵³ John Marriott and Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *Britain in India Vol. I*, Appendices I and II: the number is for registered criminal tribes in British India and Madras Presidency compiled from Bhasha Sanshodhan Prakashan Kendra, Baroda, by Meena Radhakrishna.

⁵⁴ Extract from the Proceedings of the Burma Legislative Council relating to the BHORA, Repealing Act, 1935, at a meeting held on 7 March 1935, pp. 6-8, in *The Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act Repealing Act 1935*: IOLR/L/PJ/7/1036.

⁵⁵ RCEC, p. 14.

in Burma and for requiring them to report themselves' to the authorities,⁵⁶ especially when the restriction was more than 18 months (Section 110 of the Code of Criminal Procedure would be used when the term of restriction was less than 18 months). In theory, the habitual offender would be registered and be given a pass which he was required to carry at all times. Perhaps he was confined to his village or another village tract, depending upon the view of his headman or the police. These decisions would be forwarded to an Inspector of Police, a Sub-divisional Police Officer, or a District Superintendent of Police. After consideration, a District Magistrate would decide whether the person was convicted under the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Criminal Tribes Act (which was extremely rare in Burma), or BHORA. The restriction of movement would be enforced for a maximum period of three years, subsequently reduced to one year after 1923.⁵⁷ From 1914 to 1923, some 60,000 individuals were classed as 'habituals' in Burma, indeed a shocking number.⁵⁸

However, in practice, it was extremely difficult to exercise full control over the movements of a 'habitual criminal' under BHORA. Crucial to the problem was the lack of a uniform procedure adopted by magistrates when

⁵⁶ Burma Act No. II of 1919 (Received the assent of His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of Burma on the 10th May 1919, and of His Excellency the Governor-General on the 10th June 1919, and published in the *Burma Gazette* of the 28th June 1919), in *The Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act Repealing Act 1935*.

⁵⁷ Burma Act No. II of 1919 and Burma Act No. III of 1923, in *Ibid*.

⁵⁸ Alexander Paterson, *Report on the prevention of crime and the treatment of the criminal in the Province of Burma*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1927, p. 93.

passing orders under this Act, and the fact that there were too few regular police and village officials to keep track of the criminals under the restriction. The procedures were so slack that E.C.S. Shuttleworth, the Inspector-General of Police, bitterly complained: 'Recently in the Henzada District it was found that no restriction orders were being obeyed. The prisoner stepped out of the court a free man, and then disappeared.'⁵⁹

Part of the problem was that the origins of BHORA, and indeed the other Habitual Offenders Acts, lay in a set of colonial perceptions of crime generated first in Victorian Britain and then in India. Those perceptions were, first, that other preventive actions were insufficient in themselves to deter individual habitual criminals or certain types of criminals, that is the habitual burglar, railway thief, and cattle thief.⁶⁰ In Burma, as noted earlier, the concept of the criminal tribe was rarely employed as it was in India. Rather, BHORA directly targeted at *criminals* or *groups of criminals*, not socio-biological groups. Second was the assumption that the most economical and efficacious way to deal with crime was to restrict the movements of habitual criminals. A district magistrate might take action against suspicious individuals either by 'calling upon the person to show cause why he should not be required to execute a bond for good

⁵⁹ Issue of Instruction under the Habitual Offenders' Restriction Act, Home (Police) Department, Burma, March 1922, in *BBHP* of 1922: IOLR/P/11200.

⁶⁰ Extract from the Proceedings of the Burma Legislative Council relating to the Burma Habitual Offenders' Restriction Act, Repealing Act, 1935, at a meeting held on 7 March 1935, in *The Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act Repealing Act 1935*.

behaviour', or he might implement 'an order of restriction' against that person.⁶¹

In most cases, suspected individuals or recently freed prisoners were deported to other districts rather than returned to their own district, in order to prevent them from repeating their crimes. Most British officials looked at this measure as just and humane. But, crucially, whether BHORA was an appropriate measure to suppress criminals and potential criminals was often fiercely debated in Burma. The original BHORA was amended in 1923 [Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction (Amendment) Act, 1923] with minor adjustments, notably to reduce the period of restriction and surveillance of the deportee from three years to one year.⁶² Then, in 1935, a fierce debate in the Burma Legislative Council between the Burmese, on the one hand, and British and 'Anglicised' Burmese members on the other brought another major change to BHORA. While the Act was widely regarded among British officials as a cost-effective and appropriate means to control criminals, Burmese members of the Legislative Council saw its provision as abusive and cruel. U Ni, the member for Myingyan North (General Rural) remarked severely:

Sometimes persons who have cataracts in both eyes or whose limbs are deformed or fingers cut off and who, as a result, will not be able to earn a living like other ordinary persons are deported and restricted in places where they have never been

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Burma Act No. III – An Act to amend the Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act, 1919, in The Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act Repealing Act 1935.

to in all their lives. The Act is otherwise a source of constant danger to the public as it is against the fundamental principle of justice to punish a man without being able to prove against him that he has committed any known offence.⁶³

Another criticism of BHORA made in the Legislative Council was that the act encouraged misconduct and corruption on the part of the police and headmen. Police officers, district magistrates, or village headmen would, it was argued, use the act to get rid of their enemies. The number of genuine habitual criminals was exceptionally low.⁶⁴ Instead of being an effective measure to tackle crime, U Ni claimed, the pressure to force deportees away from their families, friends, and familiar environments created further problems: 'these deportees who become thoroughly dehumanized very soon after their deportation are always prone to be desperate and they are a very good ready material for those who really intend to commit dacoities.'⁶⁵ Moreover it was feared that the deportation of habitual criminals would spread crime to the areas to which they were being sent.

While from time to time admitting that the act had major flaws, most British officials saw BHORA as the only effective measure to deal with the prevalence of dacoity. Without it, dacoit gangs would be difficult to detect and deter. Besides, together with such crime control measures as the

⁶³ The Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act, 1935, Statement of Objects and Reasons, in *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

punitive police, where additional police were sent into villages at the villagers' own expense, BHORA, it was insisted, was one of the most effective ways to reduce the costs of modern policing. In defence of BHORA, the Inspector-General of Police, Lieutenant Colonel C. de M. Wellborne, argued that BHORA was meant to be used only when absolutely necessary. From 1925 to 1935, he explained, only 6,524 offenders had been ordered to furnish security under BHORA, compared to 20,998 tried under Section 110 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.⁶⁶ In 1933, there were 2,420 convictions under the Code of Criminal Procedure but 517 under BHORA. The figures showed that 'the Police and the Magistrates are doing their best only to use the Habitual Offenders Restriction Act on criminals for whom the Act is suitable.'⁶⁷

Crucially, the implication of these arguments was that the Burma government could no longer rely purely on the police and the prison systems in order to reduce crime. In the early 1920s, the Home Member added in the Legislative Council that the government was facing considerable economic hardship: 'we have no money to build more jails. Big jails like the Rangoon Central Jail cost lakhs and lakhs and lakhs of rupees. We cannot afford that. . . To lock them up in jail and to feed them means more money. It costs about Rs. 100 or more per head per year.'⁶⁸ It is

⁶⁶ Extract from the Proceedings of the Burma Legislative Council relating to the BHORA, Repealing Act, 1935, at a meeting held on 7 March 1935, in *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

obvious that this economizing by-product of the adoption of BHORA was a mechanism to relieve overcrowded prisons of petty criminals and bad characters. This was recognised from the early days of its use. Moreover, the use of the Act kept labour in the market. In 1916, the Inspector-General of Police, Lieutenant-Colonel H. DesVœux, observed that BHORA was particularly beneficial, in that the bad characters restricted by the Act to their village added to the supply of agricultural workers. To the Inspector-General of Police, that in itself could reform bad characters. Prisons, he argued, were a place to confine only the worst kind of criminals because 'the average man's character is not improved by his residence in jail.'⁶⁹ But, as noted earlier, the preventive sections, though in rigorous use in India, lost much momentum in Burma. Thus the reformatory schools, developed extensively in India, were not found in Burma.

It is worth noting here that although religious missions in India were, to some degree, successful in reforming juvenile criminals, transforming them into useful labourers, at the close of the 1920s, there were only two reformatory settlements for youth offenders in Burma, namely the Reformatory School in Insein and the Reformatory Gaol in Meiktila, accepting youth offenders from the age of 8.⁷⁰ The first detention centre for

⁶⁹ From Lieutenant-Colonel H. DesVœux, Inspector-General of Police, Burma, to the Chief Secretary – No. 10655-4C.-2, XXXIII, dated 23 November 1916, Supervision of habitual criminals in Burma. Proposed legislation with a view to secure a better [missing] – in *BBHP* of December 1916: IOLR/P/9906.

⁷⁰ *Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Treatment of Juvenile Delinquency in Burma*. Rangoon: Printing and Stationary, 1928, Miscellaneous Resolution.

juvenile convicts in Burma was at Paungde, founded after the Reformatory School Act of 1876 which was extended to Burma in 1881. The site at Paungde, however, could accept no more than 75 inmates at any one time. The reformatory school was moved to Insein, close to the Insein Central Gaol, in 1896. Of course, the two sites at Meiktila and Insein were insufficient for the whole province, and indeed were initially formed simply to confine, not for training or reforming the juvenile delinquents. Plans for the development of the reformatory schools to embrace practical forms of vocational studies were constantly turned down. In the early 1920s, Mark Hunter, the Director of Public Instruction in Burma, strongly criticized a proposed extension of reformatory punishments to other certified schools and some *pongyi kyaung* (Buddhist temples), claiming that large amounts of money would be spent on mixing 'those who were morally diseased' with normal children.⁷¹ Adding to Hunter's views, H.A. Thornton, the Commissioner of the North-East Frontier Division, pointed out that children who committed crimes at a young age were 'precocious and are likely to secure an altogether undesirable influence over other children of their age with whom they may be thrown into contact.'⁷²

⁷¹ Mark Hunter, Director of Public Instruction, Burma, to the Secretary to the Government of Burma, No. 18653-8G.-17, dated 23 December 1922, in Proposals of the Commissioner, Mandalay Division, for the control of juvenile and adolescent criminals in Burma. Question of framing a Children's Bill, in *BBHP* of June 1923: IOLR/P/11336.

⁷² H.A. Thornton, Commissioner, North-East Frontier Division, to the Secretary to the Government of Burma, No. 405-1J.-1, dated 20 January 1923, in *Ibid*.

Not until the visit to Burma in 1925 of a Commissioner for Prisons for England and Wales, Alexander Paterson, was it proposed to establish a Training School for young criminals, similar to the Borstal Institutions in England. One year later, a committee within the Ministry of Education was appointed to consider Paterson's proposals. The philosophy of the committee, known as the Carr Committee, was three-fold: first, to immunize children from 'the danger of being led astray by passion or by evil associates'; to decide what measures would be employed with juveniles under trial or with convictions; and finally, to decide on ways in which juvenile delinquents should be trained to prevent them from committing further crime.⁷³ The first institution for juvenile delinquents was established in Thayetmyo: around 100 boys usually in their teens, convicted of serious offences such as murder and rape, were sent there. But whether the Borstal-modelled reformatory school would suit the circumstances of Burma and the character of young Burmese convicts was often doubted.⁷⁴

At the same time, voluntary work for the reform of young criminals was begun alongside the reformatory schools in Meiktila and Insein. Similar to the government's reformatory schools, the work of Christian missions, such as the Salvation Army, seeking to reform criminals, was undertaken on only a modest scale in Burma, although there were proposals to hand over

⁷³ *Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Treatment of Juvenile Delinquency in Burma*, Miscellaneous Resolution.

⁷⁴ A.J.S. White, *The Burma of 'AJ'*. London: BACSA, 1991, p. 176.

most young offenders to the Salvation Army.⁷⁵ The Salvation Army arrived in Burma around the mid-1920s, to work mainly in Rangoon. Among its most notable activities in the province was the reform of adolescent criminals nearing the completion of their prison sentence, or sent to a reformatory school. The Juvenile-Adult Criminal Institution, or Salvation Army Prisoners' Institution, was established in Rangoon in March 1917, and was personally supported by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Harcourt Butler.⁷⁶ It provided training in occupations such as carpentry and cane-work for young criminals seen by the prison authorities as likely material for reform.⁷⁷ But unlike in India, in Burma the commitment to reforming criminals was very limited, and the work of the Salvation Army was on only a modest scale. By 1920, while there were thousands resident in the reformatory settlements of India, only 84 had been through the Juvenile-Adult Criminal Institution in Rangoon: and only 27 were still in the institution.⁷⁸

The British administration in India relied quite heavily on the reformatory settlements to break thieving, begging, killing, coin-counterfeiting, and similar offences. While the crude restriction of the movements of criminals

⁷⁵ H.A. Thornton, Commissioner, North-East Frontier Division, to the Secretary to the Government of Burma, No. 405-1J.-1, dated 20 January 1923.

⁷⁶ Solveig Smith, *By Love Compelled: the story of 100 years of the Salvation Army in India and adjacent countries*. London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1981, p. 119.

⁷⁷ Anon., 'Burma's Open Door,' *All the World*, July/September 1922, p. 356.

⁷⁸ Anon., 'The Army's work in Rangoon,' *All the World*, March 1920, p. 121.

was seen by the British in India as a success, in least in terms of the numbers of individuals proscribed, there were only two reformatory settlements in Burma. As a result, most young criminals were kept in prison, and those branded as habitual criminals were guarded in their own village or in distant tracts. Few young criminals were treated by the prison or by philanthropic organizations.

It is evident that British Indian practices in crime suppression were applied extensively in colonial Burma: and particularly important here were preventive measures because, as argued above, the British saw some individuals and groups as being more criminal than others. But in addition, some localities were more criminal or more susceptible to crime than others.

Mapping a criminal town: the case of Tharrawaddy

There was one district in Lower Burma, on the Rangoon-Mandalay rail line, that, certainly by the beginning of the 20th century, was widely regarded as the most criminal in the country, Tharrawaddy District. In the 1850s, suppressing disorder in Tharrawaddy was seen as ‘the most difficult task the British experienced in the annexation of the country.’⁷⁹ And throughout British rule in Burma, Tharrawaddy was often linked with disturbances and crime: it bred criminals and crime and became one of the most violent

⁷⁹ S.G. Grantham (compl.), *Burma Gazetteer, Tharrawaddy District, Volume A*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1920, p. 25.

districts in Burma.⁸⁰ In the early 1920s, S.G. Grantham, a British official who was a resident of Tharrawaddy for many years, remarked:

The district has an unenviable reputation for criminality in all branches, with murder and violent crime, ordinary theft and cattle theft as its specialities. Of the Tharrawaddy part of the district it is recorded in the same book [the Pegu Commissioner's letter-book of 1853] that 'since long before the memory of man the people have been disorderly and rebellious; discontent, disunion and anarchy have often prevailed there'. An old proverb ran: 'A Tharrawaddy man comes to you with a law-book in one hand and a dah [knife] in the other'. ... In his order of 1854 for the formation of separate Henzada and Tharrawaddy Districts, Sir Arthur Phayre had as his reason for the change 'the unsettled state of the township of Tharrawaddy arising from the disposition of its inhabitants who from time immemorial have been noted as a turbulent and lawless race.'⁸¹

Other British officials such as J.G.F. Hall, though not specifically referring to Tharrawaddy, saw economic change as a crucial cause of crime in this

⁸⁰ Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *The Return of the Galon King: History, Law, and Rebellion in Colonial Burma*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011, p. 1, quoting from Government of Burma, 'An Inquiry into the Causes of Crime in the Tharrawaddy District and a Search for Their Remedy,' Annex III, Letter No. 702T, 25 May 1916, Chief Secretary of the Government of Burma to the Commissioner of the Pegu Division.

⁸¹ S.G. Grantham, *Studies in the History of Tharrawaddy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920, pp. 20-22.

area. He noted, in particular, the problem of land dispossession.⁸² But in addition, increasing wealth created great competitiveness among petty landowners, tenants, and labourers, most from Upper Burma. That competitiveness, in a prosperous yet hostile new territory, created 'a sense of disharmony and recklessness which has resulted in an increase of violent crime in directions often quite unconnected with the land itself.'⁸³ This 'sense of disharmony' or 'the upset social equilibrium' was, for Hall, the principal cause of criminality.

⁸² Ibid., p. 512.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 512-513, 518.

Table 6: Crime Statistics in Lower Burma, 1901-1910

District	1901		1902		1903		1904		1905		1906		1907		1908		1909		1910	
	VC*	OC**	VC	OC	VC	OC	VC	OC	VC	OC	VC	OC	VC	OC	VC	OC	VC	OC	VC	OC
Thayetmyo	337	293	287	253	439	223	411	199	373	224	382	420	392	364	286	235	202	203	293	217
Akyab	339	136	327	223	320	272	207	186	334	189	317	171	215	223	207	294	221	326	251	355
Tharrawaddy	1071	478	826	523	1290	818	676	592	536	990	732	606	816	634	771	560	916	703	959	677
Hanthawaddy (Syriam)	788	231	864	351	960	354	1,055	316	1,046	361	983	364	918	389	785	378	669	479	805	536
Pegu	N/A	N/A	295	N/A	208	295	558	370	793	393	795	423	762	463	658	460	716	444	661	412
Prome	829	297	904	532	724	537	639	483	777	459	693	618	490	495	509	501	386	473	509	563
Bassein	1,082	391	764	321	998	390	1,063	433	1,123	390	1,086	409	1,037	334	851	350	1,216	432	1,626	480

Source: *Burma, Burma Gazetteer Volume B – Akyab, Bassein, Hanthawaddy (Syriam), Pegu, Prome, Tharrawaddy, and Thayetmyo*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1912-1913, various statistical tables on crime.

Notes –

*Violent crime [V] consists of the following: rioting and unlawful assembly, offences affecting life, grievous hurt, cattle theft, robbery and dacoity, house-breaking and theft, coinage offences, and bad livelihood

**Other crime [O] – usually represented as minor crime – are offences under the following laws: Opium Act, Excise Act, and Forest Law.

The table above shows that crime rates in Tharrawaddy in the early 20th century were not always higher than the rates in other districts in Lower Burma. Districts such as Hanthawaddy (Syriam), Pegu, and Bassein also suffered considerable violent crime. But unlike Tharrawaddy, these districts were more populated or housed large industries, such as the oil facilities in Syriam, which attracted migrants from Upper Burma and India. Precisely why and how Tharrawaddy became known as a criminal town is not clear but British officials who served in Tharrawaddy, such as Grantham, felt that the reputation was not justified: 'The uncritical repetition of the earliest reports of the criminal character of the Tharrawaddy District has unfortunately given rise to a widespread belief that all its energies and genius have since the time of the pithecanthropus been combined in and concentrated upon the production of crime and that good order has never been known there.'⁸⁴

The criminal reputation of Tharrawaddy was undoubtedly fuelled by an important historical memory. Tharrawaddy was the name of a prominent Konbaung ruler, King Tharrawaddy (1787-1846). As a crown prince in the reign of his brother, King Bagyidaw (r. 1819-1837), the vigorous Prince Tharrawaddy assisted Maha Bandula – the great Burmese warrior – to fight against the British during the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26. Prince Tharrawaddy subsequently staged a coup against his brother and ruthlessly executed all his political rivals. At this time, the British became wary: 'By the early 1840s, British policy-makers grew fearful that Ava, having crushed an uprising in the delta and having re-organized the army, would launch a

⁸⁴ S.G. Grantham, *Studies in the History of Tharrawaddy*, p. 23.

surprise attack on British Moulmein.⁸⁵ It was in the last years of King Bagyidaw's reign, with the king's power waning and palace intrigues rife, that gangs of bandits and ruffians emerged, their activities believed to be patronised by Prince Tharrawaddy. Even after ascending the throne, King Tharrawaddy was still known as the great patron of criminals. These gangs 'lived near his palace, formed a kind of body-guard, and were ready at a moment's notice for any desperate undertaking.'⁸⁶ The Prince's palace also bore the name 'nest of robbers.'⁸⁷ In a letter written by Eugenio Kincaid from Moulmein to the editor of the *American Baptist Missionary Magazine* in April 1839, the possibility of an uprising staged by the court was briefly mentioned:

Barbarous or half-civilized powers are certain to construe forbearance into fear, and a spirit of conciliation into a tacit acknowledgement of weakness. Colonel Benson thinks the king is inclined to be on friendly terms with the English, but he is under the influence of two headstrong sons, and a large number of robber chieftains, to whom he owes his elevation to the throne. Active preparations for war are still going forward, in all parts of Burmah. Such is the present state of affairs. War, however, is by no means certain. Some revolution may take

⁸⁵ Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 22.

⁸⁶ Henry Gouger, *Personal Narrative of Two Years' Imprisonment in Burmah*. London, 1860, pp. 45-46 [reprinted Bangkok: White Lotus, 2003].

⁸⁷ An Enquiry into the Causes of Crime in the Tharrawaddy District and a Search for their Remedy, in Reference – Letter No. 702T, dated 25 May 1916, from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, to the Commissioner of the Pegu Division: IOLR/L/PJ/6/1675.

place in Burmah that will result in restoring former friendly relations.⁸⁸

However, while most districts in Lower Burma remained relatively calm at the beginning of British rule, the large dacoit gangs having been eliminated, disturbances were still prevalent in some areas, and more specifically in the northern part of Tharrawaddy. Grantham suggested that the cause of such instability lay in fundamental weaknesses of village administration. For example, there were conflicts between village officials, between *Myowun* and *Sitke*, usually over the right to collect revenues. As a consequence, 'the people had always been disorderly and rebellious; discontent, disunion and anarchy had often prevailed.'⁸⁹ It might also be assumed that criminals from Upper Burma found it easier to operate in Lower Burma because they could escape back north, beyond the reach of the British authorities. Nonetheless, the most notorious gangs were all from Lower Burma. One of the largest disturbances before the annexation of Upper Burma in the mid-1880s involved Gaung Gyi, a restless 80-year-old *thugyi* from Tapun, between 1853 and 1855. Receiving secret backing from the Burmese court, Gaung Gyi staged a rebellion against the British and easily attracted many *thugyis* and *yazawutgaungs* to his side. Other desperate individuals join the disturbances, looting and stealing because of food shortages.⁹⁰ The suppression of the Gaung Gyi gang involved

⁸⁸ Michael Charney, "Some Documents of Tharrawaddy's Reign: 1837-1846, Part I," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 1 (2003), p. 51.

⁸⁹ S.G. Grantham, *Burma Gazetteer, Tharrawaddy District, Volume A*, p. 25.

⁹⁰ An Enquiry into the Causes of Crime in the Tharrawaddy District and a Search for their Remedy, in Reference – Letter No. 702T, dated 25 May 1916, from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, to the Commissioner of the Pegu Division.

the formation of a locally-recruited police force, which in turn led to the establishment of the first Burmese paramilitary police troop, the Pegu Light Infantry, to patrol the turbulent portions of Lower Burma then occupied by Gaung Gyi's forces.

According to Grantham, Tharrawaddy had been well known as a disturbed town before the colonial period. During the Gaung Gyi disturbances, the local population was indifferent, refusing to render assistance to British troops. After months of pursuing Gaung Gyi, the government offered 2,000 rupees – a very large sum of money at the time – as a reward for the capture of the dacoit leader alive and untortured. The value of the reward was later increased tenfold. This suggests that the British believed that the suppression of disturbances required local co-operation. When police forces were sent to disturbed districts, it was found to be more efficient to recruit scout-styled constables locally. Many military police outposts were established and local *bo* (chiefs) were appointed to recruit men locally to pursue Gaung Gyi and his gang. Without local intelligence, the British would struggle to maintain order. But often that local intelligence was not forthcoming and the British began to lose confidence in the people and the country they had colonized.⁹¹ Finally, after close pursuit by the police and the army, the Gaung Gyi gang was broken up around the beginning of 1855.

During the period between the suppression of Gaung Gyi and the eruption of the Third Anglo-Burmese war, Tharrawaddy was relatively quiet. Dacoities and small-scale rebellions took place but no longer posed a significant threat to the colonial administration. The introduction of the

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

railway brought changes to the ways in which criminal gangs operated. Criminals could now escape much more freely. The railway police were established in the early 1880s, operating mainly in Tharrawaddy: but the separate force was expensive and was abolished in 1885.⁹² In the mid-1880s, during the third war, another wave of violent crime erupted. Grantham attributed this increase in crime to two main factors: first, the inefficiency of the police in spite of a major overhaul of the force; and a new policy which enabled local officials to issue gun licenses more freely.⁹³

The rise in crime in this period was particularly disturbing for the British authorities because it was apparent that the anti-colonial disturbances were contagious. Notorious dacoit gangs, big and small, were often linked to leaders who claimed lineage to the Burmese throne, and who claimed further to have powers through amulets, tattoos, and other charms that would make the wearer invulnerable to attacks by firearms. The improvements in communications, notably the railway, also provided ease of communication for crime. But the railways also allowed for the consolidation of British control: '[the railway would] be equal to the addition of several Regiments to the Garrison of Burma', because 'troops and military stores could then be sent quickly and at a smaller expense from Rangoon to the frontier.'⁹⁴

⁹² *Report on the Police Administration of Burma for the Years 1881, 1882, and 1885*, various pages.

⁹³ S.G. Grantham, *Burma Gazetteer, Tharrawaddy District, Volume A*, pp. 34-35.

⁹⁴ Proceedings in the Public Works Department, Burma, No. 2, December 1876; and No. 3, December 1876, quoted in Maung Shein, *Burma's Transport and Foreign Trade (1885-1914)*. Rangoon: University of Rangoon, 1964, p. 59.

The largest anti-colonial rebellion in the 1880s, however, originated not in Tharrawaddy but in Shwegyin, another large railway hub. In 1885, a 'sudden storm' of rebellion was led first by a Shan monk called Kyaukkalay *pongyi*, at the head of Shan and Burman bands of dacoits. These were then joined by a larger group under a highly influential Mayangyang *pongyi*, again a Shan, who claimed to be a Thibaw *minlaung* (pretender).⁹⁵ The rebellion, which took place shortly after the annexation of Mandalay, spread rapidly from Shwegyin in Toungoo District to Thaton, to Pegu to the west, and then to Tharrawaddy. As was often the case, it was reported that the performance of the detective branch of the police was very poor. The police and Burmese village officials on the British side did not hear about the rebellion, and indeed were described as 'worse than useless'.⁹⁶ Lower Burma was then free from large-scale rebellion for many years, and the troops and police battalions were withdrawn to Rangoon, Toungoo and Moulmein, leaving punitive police stationed in Prome, Henzada, Bassein, and Tharrawaddy.

When there were sporadic dacoities in Lower Burma, more experimental police troops, the Karen levies, were established, villages were disarmed, special magistrates were appointed, and Deputy Commissioners were given special powers in order to secure more convictions and to restore order.⁹⁷ In mid-1888, there was an outbreak of cholera and several months of drought,

⁹⁵ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1885*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1886, p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma for the Year 1885*, Appendix, 'Rebellion in the Shwegyin District'.

⁹⁷ S.G. Grantham, *Burma Gazetteer, Tharrawaddy District, Volume A*, p. 35.

which led to very poor harvests. Due to the consequently turbulent state of certain areas in Lower Burma, punitive police and troops were sent in, the costs being met by the villagers themselves. In 1887, after the rebellion at Shwegyin, the punitive police costs were put at 76,533 rupees.⁹⁸ Then another serious rebellion occurred, this time in Tharrawaddy district, under the leadership of U Thuriya, a *pongyi* from a monastery near Zigon, some 60 miles from Tharrawaddy town. U Thuriya declared himself to be a *minlaung* of the Myingun Prince, with connections to the late notorious Gaung Gyi.⁹⁹ He attracted a large number of followers, including dacoits from the district.

Though short-lived, the U Thuriya rebellion illustrates interesting aspects of British rule and the socio-economic changes in Lower Burma that it instigated. Toshikatsu Ito, in his pioneering study of the U Thuriya rebellion, suggests that the primary cause of the unusually high level of lawlessness in Tharrawaddy in this period lay in the boom in the rice industry. By 1886, Tharrawaddy had the highest crime rate in Burma, although Lower Burma was a centre of economic prosperity. Tharrawaddy, in the upper delta, was

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

⁹⁹ Instead of claiming to be King Thibaw's pretender, like other rebel leaders before him, U Thuriya claimed a strong link with the Myingun Prince, a son of King Mindon (1853-1878). The Prince came to be superstitiously associated with invulnerability for, after King Thibaw and his queen, Supayalat, eradicated their political rivals, the Myingun Prince, in exile, was the only royal survivor. After the annexation of Upper Burma, the name of the Myingun Prince was often linked to plans to restore the Burmese monarchy. Toshikatsu Ito, "U Thuriya's Rebellion – The anti-colonial uprising in late 19th Century Lower Burma," in The Burma Research Group, *Burma and Japan: basic studies on their cultural and social structure*. Tokyo: Toyota Foundation, 1987, p. 22; and S.G. Grantham, *Burma Gazetteer, Tharrawaddy District, Volume A*, p. 37.

attracting high numbers of impoverished cultivators from Upper Burma. Between 1871 and 1881, the population in the vicinity of the railway, flanked by the Myitmaka River in the west and the Pegu Yoma in the east, more than doubled.¹⁰⁰ But many of the new cultivators rapidly lost their land through indebtedness and were impoverished. Between 1881 and 1931, the class structure in this part of Tharrawaddy district changed markedly. According to Ito's calculations, in 1881, 6.0 percent of the population of Tharrawaddy District were landlords, 83.6 per cent owner-cultivators, 4.4 percent tenants, and a mere 6.1 percent agricultural labourers. But in 1931, 1.5 percent were landlords, 21.4 percent owner-cultivators, 22.9 percent tenants, and no less than 54.3 percent landless agriculture labourers.¹⁰¹ Those who worked the land had lost the land.

Given these fundamental socio-economic changes, much to the detriment of the local cultivator, and the long history of unrest and disturbance in this area, it is little surprising that Tharrawaddy had a reputation for soaring crime and disorder. At the same time, by the turn of the 20th century, violent crime in the district had fallen, and it was no longer the most criminal district in Burma.¹⁰² Possibly important in this improvement were the re-organization of the police force in the 1900s, and the introduction of pre-emptive measures to combat crime. Moreover, the punitive police were more active than ever before.

¹⁰⁰ Toshikatsu Ito, "U Thuriya's Rebellion," p. 210.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁰² S.G. Grantham, *Studies in the History of Tharrawaddy*, p. 20.

Discussion of the alleged criminality of Tharrawaddy would not be complete without a reference to the Hsaya San Rebellion, the most serious anti-colonial revolt in Burmese history. Although Hsaya San himself was originally from Shwebo in Upper Burma, the rebellion under his leadership erupted in Tharrawaddy in December 1930, and then spread to other key areas of Lower Burma and indeed as far afield as the Shan States. The vision projected by Hsaya San of a life freed from foreign rule, with no taxes, no police, and no economic hardship, together with the use of magical charms deployed through tattooing and amulets, led the rebellion to attract thousands of followers. The rebellion began with a series of murderous attacks on village headmen and government officials, and then grew greatly in intensity and ferocity.

The causes of the rebellion have been long debated. The colonial administration focused on Hsaya San's millenarian ambitions and his 'exploitation of the superstitious' beliefs of the rural Burmese.¹⁰³ It argued that the rebellion was driven by 'hatred of the government and an intention

¹⁰³ His title, *hsaya*, carries many meanings and connotations. Literally, *hsaya* is a teacher or a practitioner of various professions: *bedin-hsaya* is a fortune teller and *ka-maung hsaya* is a taxi driver. In Hsaya San's case, *hsaya* was attached to his name to indicate his specialism as a 'quack doctor' who practiced traditional medicine, fortune-telling, magic and tattooing to render those tattooed invulnerable. In addition, Hsaya San often projected himself as a *Min-laung*, king-to-be or pretender. Finally, a crucial concept for Hsaya San was that of *hpon*, power, glory or accumulated merit from past lives: the concept is used primarily to claim legitimacy as a person who has accumulated meritorious deeds to become an embryonic king. From Department of the Myanmar Language Commission, *Myanmar-English Dictionary*. Rangoon: Ministry of Education, 2001, pp. 129, 351, 328, and Patricia Herbert, *The Hsaya San Rebellion (1930-1932), Reappraised*. Working Papers No. 27, Melbourne: Monash University, 1982, pp. 4-5.

to destroy it.’ But others drew attention to economic causes, seeing the rebellion as a consequence of the impoverishment of rural Burma under British rule. Responding to the government’s official report published in 1934, *The Origin and Causes of the Burma Rebellion (1930-1932)*, Journal Kyaw U Chit Maung, a hugely popular journalist and Tharrawaddy-born, wrote:

...there were hundreds of thousands like him who were finding it increasingly difficult to live in peace and contentment under a Government which was alien. The Burmese in their own country were beginning to find that the rulers did not mean to do much to improve their lot or to apportion an appreciable share of the country’s vast wealth to them. There was not only no means of obtaining larger incomes but also no means of preserving what little they already owned in the teeth of increasing Indian and Chinese competition, which was already beginning to suffocate them.¹⁰⁴

It took the government more than two years to quell the rebellion, and required the deployment of troops brought in from India, the local forces proving insufficient. Hsaya San himself was captured in late 1932, tried, and then hanged, together with a considerable number of other rebel leaders. There would be no more major rural uprisings in Burma under British rule. Instead, in its last full decade, the British colonial administration was to face a number of serious urban challenges, growing Burmese nationalist protest but also violent clashes between the Burmese and the immigrant Indian populations. These will be the focus of the following chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Journal Gyaw Ma Ma Lay, *A Man Like Him: Portrait of the Burmese Journalist*, Journal Kyaw U Chit Maung. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2009, Appendix A – The Real Origin and Causes of the Burma Rebellion (1930-32), p. 191.

The police in a time of crisis

Throughout the 1930s, Burma was plagued by all kinds of disturbance, from rebellion, student strikes, labour dispute, to riots. Some of these disturbances were purely communal, some were politically driven, and others stemmed from individuals' calls for a better standard of living. However, a central factor was the growing tension between the indigenous Buddhist Burmans and the dominating Indian community, which was greatly exacerbated, if not exaggerated, by nationalist groups, the vernacular press, as well as ultra-conservative Buddhist associations

Indian-Burmese communal conflict had its origins in the substantial Indian immigration into Burma during the second half of the 19th century, largely in response to greatly expanding opportunities for skilled and unskilled labour outside agriculture, while the Burmese earned their living in rice cultivation in the delta. Consequently, for those Burmese workers who remained in the urban centres, jobs were scarce, and the fact that they were forced to compete with cheaper, and often more hard-working, Indian labour was bitterly resented. As the Burmese nationalist movement began to gather strength from the beginning of the 20th century, resentment against the Indian presence began to develop the potential for violence. To this was added the increasing use and manipulation of labour strikes to challenge the colonial

government. At first the strikes were poorly organized but by the 1930s, they represented a serious challenge to the colonial social and political order.

Moreover, greatly influential in the economy of colonial Burma and in the lives of the Burmese were the Indian money-lenders (Chettiers), particularly when, from the 1920s and into the 1930s, that group became important as owners of agricultural land, while indebted Burmese were driven off their land. By the late 1930s, almost two-fifths of agricultural land in Lower Burma was in the hands of landlords, most of whom were Indian moneylenders who had taken the land when their debtors had defaulted.¹ There existed, therefore, a substantial gap in wealth and economic power between the Indian moneylender and the Burmese agriculturalist.

The series of communal disturbances during the 1930s in Burma began with the Rangoon Central Jail riot in 1930: there were then attacks on Chinese and Indian residents both inside and outside Rangoon. The first anti-Indian riot, also known as the Coringhee (Telugu) riot, also broke out in 1930. Those involved in the 1930 communal riots were the local Coringhee and Burman workers, and the violence arose principally from a dispute over pay for Indian dock workers. Initially, the Coringhee, as well as other Indian workers across Lower Burma, went on strike to protest against Mahatma Gandhi's arrest in India in early May 1930. The Burma government suspected that there were groups or individuals who, for political reasons,

¹ Quoted from *Report of the Land and Agriculture Committee, Part II: Land Alienation*, pp. 37-38: in *The Interim Report of the Riot Enquiry Committee*, Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary, 1939, p. 12.

‘were straining every nerve to prevent those labourers from resuming work.’² The strike, which was originally inspired by nationalist politics in India, later developed into a strike for higher wages.³ When the Burmese, who had been brought in to substitute for the striking Indians, were dismissed after the Coringhees, who were widely regarded as the lowest class of Indian labourers in Burma, had agreed to return to work, the riot erupted. Angry Burmese workers armed with weapons began attacking Indians in downtown Rangoon. At least 82 Indians were killed and another 673 were wounded. Casualties among Burmans were considerably lower, just 9 deaths and only 72 injured.⁴

The Hsaya San Rebellion, which began in late December of the same year, also exhibited a strong anti-Indian element. In Pegu and Toungoo, rebels allegedly set fire to hundreds of Indian huts, Indian shops were looted, and agricultural produce was destroyed.⁵ Towards the end of the decade, there

² Copy of Telegram from Viceroy, Home Department to Secretary of State for India, repeating telegram from Governor of Burma, dated Simla, 2 June 1930, No. 3392 at 3.15 P.M., in No disturbances in Burma, following arrest of Gandhi, on 5/5 or 6/5: IOLR/L/PJ/6/2006 File 2290.

³ Copy of Telegram from Viceroy, Home Department to Secretary of State for India, repeating telegram from Governor of Burma, dated Simla, 27 May 1930 at 7.30 P.M., in Ibid.

⁴ Riots in Burma, Burma Office, No. 5178 of 1938, in Burma riots: situation reports: IOLR/M/3/513. The report noted the number of casualties from the 1930 Coringhee Riot.

⁵ “Communal Trouble at Pegu,” *Rangoon Times*, 30 March 1931: quoted from Outrages on Indian agriculturalists in the Pegu and Toungoo districts of Burma in March 1931: IOLR/L/PJ/7/124.

were labour strikes involving the Burmah Oil Company, student strikes and boycotts in 1938 and 1939, and perhaps most importantly, a new episode of communal riots in July 1938. The causes of the latter disturbance were complex and will be discussed in greater detail later.

During the 1930s, the communal disturbances in Rangoon and elsewhere began to develop more complex characters, notably with the combination of anti-colonial and anti-foreigner propaganda driven by nationalist politicians. Almost all the communal disturbances in the 1930s involved attempts by nationalists to end colonial rule by mobilizing groups of Burmese, the working classes and Marxist-influenced radical students. Workers were encouraged to protest against their British employers and to use violent means to bring Indian and European economic domination to an end. Paradoxically, while the 'Indian-phobia' phenomenon⁶ reached its peak in urban areas, villagers in rural Burma turned to Gandhi-inspired civil disobedience campaigns to refuse tax payment and to boycott Indian goods, so much so that Gandhi himself was compelled to beg for reconciliation between the two communities.⁷

At the first sign of communal tension, the police were called upon to maintain order. Crucial in the employment of the police in these demanding circumstances was the use of the military police in the suppression of urban unrest, while the civil police simply provided support, and the regular troops

⁶ See Renaud Egretieu, "Burmese Indians in contemporary Burma: heritage, influence, and perceptions since 1988," *Asian Ethnicity* 12 (2011): 33.

⁷ "Gandhi condemns Burma riots," Telegrams from Reuters Special Service, 5 August 1938, 8.35 A.M., in Burma riots: situation reports.

were brought in to restore order during the most violent incidents. The racially constructed police force was clearly in an extremely difficult position in such circumstances. On the one hand, the racial composition of the police, with a relatively small number of Burman recruits, arguably made it more ruthless and efficient. It was widely believed that Burman policemen would abandon their posts when faced with disorder, and when called upon to arrest their own countrymen on behalf of the British.⁸ On the other hand, recruiting police officers and constables from India and Europe distanced the police from the Burmese population: in other words, the police were never seen as being part of the local society but rather as an instrument of colonial repression. A predominantly alien police force faced a hostile indigenous Burmese population. That divide was most clearly seen in the Indian-Burmese riots of 1938 which will be the central discussion in this chapter.

The 1938 communal riots

On the morning of 26 July 1938, an anti-Indian riot broke out in Rangoon. It lasted for 5 days. As admitted by the Governor, Sir Archibald Cochrane, it was difficult to single out one single event as the cause of the disturbances. But it was generally seen that one crucial factor was the re-publication of an anti-Buddhist booklet, *Moulvi-Yogi Awada Sadan*, sometimes referred to as

⁸ *Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Re-organization of the Police Force of Lower Burma*: NADM, 4/1 (22) R.87 1318. The view that the Burmans were inferior in police work was prevalent among British officials, and this would explain why almost all Burman police were subordinate to Indian police officers. At some point, Burman police officers were prohibited from giving orders to Indian constables.

Moulvi and Yogi Wada, written by an Burmese Muslim, Maung Shwe Hpi.⁹ In one passage from many disparaging remarks on Buddhism, to give an example, Maung Shwe Hpi wrote: 'So it was decided that Gaudama Buddhagyi, a Hindu outcaste Brahmin, became a Burmese God. It was also decided to reject him into the outcaste God and the outcaste Law.'¹⁰ The pamphlet, rather than a book, had first appeared in Mandalay in 1931 but had then circulated only among a few Muslims in Upper Burma. Only 50 or so copies of this first edition of Maung Shwe Hpi's pamphlet circulated in Mandalay, Myitkyina, and Shwebo districts.¹¹ But at the beginning of 1938, 3,000 copies of the same pamphlet were re-printed, and some passages appeared in Burmese newspapers with grossly exaggerated comments.¹² This marked the beginning of an India-phobic uproar and anti-Muslim campaign.

While attempting to dissociate themselves from Maung Shwe Hpi and his writings, Burma's Muslim community noted that his pamphlet had been written in response to an anti-Islam pamphlet written by a Burmese monk called U Pan Nyo in 1930, which had caused uproar among Muslims in

⁹ *Final Report of the Riot Enquiry Committee* [henceforth *FRREC*]. Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary, 1939, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ *Rangoon Sun*, 21 July 1938, quoted from Dammagatha U Yewata's article, 'The Buddhist Religion has been insulted,' in Burma riots: situation reports.

¹¹ *FRREC*, pp. 1-2.

¹² Copy of personal letter from Sir A. Cochrane to Lord Zetland (Secretary of State for India), 30 July 1938, in Burma riots: situation reports.

Upper Burma.¹³ But, as noted, Shwe Hpi's writings caused anger only when they were re-printed in the popular press. Burmese Buddhists took them as a serious insult to their religion. The situation was exacerbated by claims that Shwe Hpi was a Muslim convert of Buddhist Burman origin.¹⁴ The British authorities also saw in the disturbances attempts by opposition politicians to discredit their opponents in the House of Representatives, after the separation of Burma from India in 1937.

To fully understand the 1938 riots, it is important to recognize the complexity of the Muslim population in late colonial Burma. There were in fact four principal groups. There were the Panthays, Chinese Muslims (Hui or Hui-hui) who had migrated from Yunnan and the Muslims of Arakan, known since the 1950s as the 'Rohingya'. These groups were of little economic significance. But then, of considerable economic importance, as merchants, workers, and civil servants, there were the Indian Muslims, mainly Urdu and Tamil speakers. And finally, there were the Burmese Muslims who could trace their origins back to earlier centuries, when Arab, Persian, and Muslim Indian traders arrived in Burma, settled, and married local women: the children of such marriages were widely referred to as 'Zerbadis'.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ A letter from the chairman of a meeting of representatives of Muslim communities and associations in Burma relating to the recent disturbances in Rangoon and elsewhere, No. 4592/1938, in *BBHP* of December 1921: IOLR/P/11030.

¹⁵ Andrew Selth, *Burma's Muslims: Terrorists or Terrorised?* Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, the Australian National University, 2003, pp. 5-7. The fruits of Hindu-Burmese marriages were called 'Kalais'.

In the context of the 1938 riots, no group was more outspoken than the Zerbadis. Regarding themselves as neither Indian nor Burman, the Zerbadis disliked the term and preferred to identify themselves simply as Burmese Muslims. It might be worth quoting a 1938 letter from a group of Zerbadis to the editor of the *Rangoon Gazette*, an English language newspaper, in which they expressed their bitterness:

We 'Zerbadis' of Burma number well above half a million people. We have always been in abject ignorance and absent indifference to all political movements and changes that go on around us in Burma or elsewhere. Our ignorance is great that we do not know from where we came; and when we came. We do not know why we call ourselves 'Zerbadis'. We do not know what is the meaning of that word 'Zerbadis'.¹⁶

After the separation from India in 1937, a substantial number of Muslim Indians and Zerbadis remained in Burma and now usually identified themselves as Burmese, as opposed to India-born Muslims or Indian Muslims. Nonetheless, these Indian Muslims and Burma-born Indians did not enjoy good relations with the Burmans. In their words, 'the Burmans call us Kalas (Indians) and denounce us as their enemies.'¹⁷

¹⁶ 'Advice Warned to the Editor,' *Rangoon Gazette*, in Burma riots: situation reports.

¹⁷ Adoniram Judson defined kalas as follows: 'a race ... one whose race is distinctly marked, a caste person; a native of any country west of Burma; a foreigner ...' The contemporary usage of the word, as defined in the Ministry of Education Myanmar-English Dictionary, is 'native of the Indian Subcontinent.' Although the word 'kala' is widely used in present-day Burma, many, both Indians and Burmans, consider it offensive while the word 'Zerbadi' is

Before the press took the opportunity to widely publicize its provocative message, 1,000 copies of the second edition of Maung Shwe Hpi's pamphlet were published in Rangoon early in 1938 as an appendix to a rather low-key Burmese novel, 'The Abode of Nat', written by a Buddhist author, Maung Htin Baw. His motive was not clear but the Riot Enquiry Committee concluded that

Maung Htin Baw saw, and seized, an opportunity to get a little publicity and cheap advertising for his novel by publishing with it what he recognised as being a sensational discovery ... there was in the case of those who used the opportunity provided, any deliberate intention to provoke communal disturbances between Indians and Burmans.¹⁸

It should be noted that both the original version of Shwe Hpi's pamphlet and the appendix of Maung Htin Baw's novel were not censored by the authorities. It was allowed to be published, presumably because, without fluency in Pali — Maung Shwe Hpi was a highly-qualified Islamic scholar — the book was inaccessible to the Burmese public and indeed to British officials.¹⁹

Almost as soon as it reached Rangoon, a week after its first distribution in Mandalay in early July 1938, extracts from Maung Shwe Hpi's book had

no longer, or only very rarely used: Adoniram Judson, *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*. Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1921, p. 194.

¹⁸ *FRREC*, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

generated the first wave of protest, mainly from members of the Thathana Mamaka Young Sangha Association (henceforth TMYSA), an outspoken branch of a conservative sangha association and a key supporter of the Premier, Dr Ba Maw. The first harshly critical editorial, written by a well-respected *sayadaw* (senior monk), Ledi U Withokdasara, was published in *The Rangoon Sun* (*Thuriya* in Burmese), arguably the most influential vernacular newspaper. In John F. Cady's words, *Thuriya* and other vernacular newspapers were prompt and efficient in 'the use of *agents provocateurs* designed to foment popular unrest and to provoke overt violence.'²⁰

During the intense arguments over separation from India in the first half of the 1930s, wealthy Indian businessmen in Burma had been prominent in the anti-separation campaign. As a consequence, they often became a target for the nationalist press. As separation from India drew closer, the press shifted its attention to the social and religious issues arising from the presence of the Indian population in Burma. For example, in the year before separation in 1937, *Thuriya* published a series of articles challenging the Indian settlement in Burma. Alerted to the marked increase in the Indian population, and to the domination by Indians of colonial Burma's government service, the newspaper called for the Burmanization of some departments, for example the Posts and Telegraph Department, upon Burma's separation from India.²¹ Similarly, the *New Light of Burma* proposed tighter restrictions on further Indian immigration. In 1937, a writer in *Saithan* announced that 'It would be

²⁰ John F. Cady, *History of Modern Burma*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958, p. 391.

²¹ *IRRIC*, p. 35.

best if they [the Indians] were not here. I do not want to see them in this country ... since the dawn of history, Indians have been the leaders of attack against the Burmans on behalf of the white faces.'²² In one instance, a newspaper compared Indians, whether Burma or India-born Indians, with the Jews of Germany.²³

The xenophobic feeling among the more radical elements in the Burmese Buddhist community was, on the one hand, driven by the powerful position of Indians in Burma's economy. Of course, there were important ethnic and religious divisions within Burma's South Asian immigrant populations. But those divisions mattered little as Burmese anger grew. And another issue that greatly disturbed the minds of ordinary Burmans was the inter-marriage of Muslim men and Burmese Buddhist women. This was widely seen by the Burmese as a Muslim attempt to undermine Buddhism. The mixed marriage issue arose from the fact that most Indian Muslim immigrants were bachelors or married men who had not brought their wives with them to Burma: they often married the poorer class of local women. The practice of marriage with foreigners, previously regarded as harmless, now became controversial.²⁴ It was believed by the majority of the Burmese that such unions undermined Buddhism and allowed Islam to take root in their predominantly Buddhist society.

²² Quoted from *Saithan*, 6 June 1937, in *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²³ Quoted from *Thiha*, 5 June 1938, in *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁴ *IRRIC*, p. 30.

The issue of the conversion of Burmese women to Islam arose only when the woman had doubts about her marriage status, whether she was actually the legal wife and not the second or third wife. It was common for Indian Muslim men moving to other countries without their women and children to take further wives, although legal wives of Muslim men must be Muslim women. While marriage in customary Burmese Buddhist law was of a 'contract' character, marriage in Islamic law involved considerably less legal process. It required only the so-called 'Ijabkabul', or an offer and an acceptance with two witnesses.²⁵ Moreover, in Buddhism, as the Riot Inquiry Committee further remarked:

Burmese Buddhist Law allots to a wife an equal share in the properties acquired by her and her husband or, in certain circumstances, either of them during the marriage and gives her the whole estate as a survivor on the death of the husband. ... All that is required is an intention to contract a permanent union with a view to becoming husband and wife. Nor is there anything in Burmese Buddhist law which requires the other spouse to be a Buddhist.²⁶

Thus Buddhist monks and the Buddhist public, already increasingly embittered at the foreign presence, which appeared to be dominating Burma's wealth,²⁷ and by the conversion of Burmese women to Islam, were infuriated by the republication of Maung Shwe Hpi's book, and by the press reports and comments on it. They sought decisive action, 'as if to cleanse the

²⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁷ *FRREC*, p. 8.

dirt which has fallen on their head.’²⁸ On 21 July 1938, Dammagotha U Yewata, a leading *sayadaw* from the Shwegontaing monastery, wrote in *Thuriya*

Amongst other matters in the book...it was said that to whom we should point out to be race of Gaudama Buddha among the peoples of so many races in the West Country called India. Would you point out to a Punjabi, Coringhee, Telugu, Chetty, Oriya, Hindu, or Muslim? Would you point out that Lord Gaudama Buddha belonged to the race of Chattriya, which is akin to Kshattriyas? It was written that we could not come to a final decision.

In the meantime, the All-Burma General Council of the TMYSA, Dobama Asiayone and the press urged all Buddhists to attend a mass rally on the platform of the Shwedagon Pagoda. Twenty-thousand leaflets were distributed encouraging Burmans to boycott Indian goods and calling for the banning of Maung Shwe Hpi’s book. Although every attempt was made by the Premier, Dr Ba Maw, and Burmese Ministers to calm the mood of the Burmese public, distributing ten thousand leaflets bearing Dr Ba Maw’s signature to assure the public that the government would deal with the offensive publication and the author, it was too late.²⁹ In the districts, there

²⁸ ‘The Buddhist Religion has been insulted,’ *Thuriya*, 21 July 1938, in Burma riots: situation reports.

²⁹ Telegrams from Reuters Special Service, 26 July 1938, 8.14 P.M., in Ibid.

were rumours that Sule Pagoda and Shwedagon Pagoda, two of the most respected Buddhist sites in Burma, had been attacked by Muslims.³⁰

Around 1 P.M. of 26 July, approximately ten thousand people, including many monks, gathered to hear speeches from *sayadaws* attacking the book and the author. The *sayadaws*, most of whom were executive members of the General Council of the TMYSA, also focused on the controversial issues of mixed-marriage and the Indian Question, and pushed demands for 'Burma for (Buddhist) Burmans'. At the end of the rally, three hours later, those gathered had been led to believe that Burma would be 'overrun' by the Muslim population. A procession was then formed by a mob. About half of the mob were Buddhist monks, aiming to proceed down the Pagoda Road in a protest against Maung Shwe Hpi's book.³¹ The Governor, Sir Archibald Cochrane, as he watched the violence unfold, noted that the demonstration was made up not only of 'sincere Buddhists wishing to protest against an attack on their religion, but there was also a number of wearers of [the] yellow robe from the more turbulent Pongyi Kyaungs (Buddhist temples) in Rangoon who are always ready for trouble together with a considerable hooligan element.'³² The procession took on a violent character. The crowd, constantly aroused by provocative speeches, started down towards Soortee Bara Bazaar, one of Rangoon's main markets and run by a private Indian

³⁰ Memorandum submitted by the Central Relief Committee to the Burma Riot Enquiry Committee, pp.14-15, in Ibid.

³¹ W.H. Tydd, *Peacock Dreams*. London: BACSA, 1986, p.128.

³² Copy of personal letter from Sir A. Cochrane to Lord Zetland, dated 30 July 1938, in Burma riots: situation reports.

Muslim company. It was situated in the heart of the Indian Muslim commercial and residential area, in the vicinity of China Street (the present day Shwedagon Pagoda Road).

Some protestors including *pongyis* were armed with sticks and *dahs* (hand knives) hidden under their robe. Violent intent was evident in the slogans being shouted: 'Kala-Kala yaik-yaik' (hit Indians); 'Kala-yu-de Bama-ma-dwe Bama-pyi-hma-lin-sha-lo-la?' (Burmese women who marry Indians! Are husbands scarce in Burma?). The size of the crowd numbered between 1,000 and 1,500.³³ But down the Pagoda Road the numbers decreased markedly, and those who remained were mostly *pongyis*, many with sticks, bricks, stones, as they approached the Indian market.

At the corner of China Street and Pagoda Road, as Muslim passers-by and shop owners emerged, the armed faction of the crowd began throwing stones at the Indian traders and their shops: looting and arson soon followed. At this point, a few Muslims were assaulted and severely injured. When the police, led by W. H. Tydd, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, decided to baton-charge the crowd, resulting in a number of *pongyis* being injured, part of the crowd sought refuge in side streets and in the Thayettaw Kyaukdaik on nearby Godwin Road, a labyrinth of monasteries and *sangha* resident blocks near Shwedagon Pagoda. They remained there until the disturbances ended the following month.³⁴ How a number of rioters could use the

³³ *FRREC*, p. 14.

³⁴ 'Several monasteries under one jurisdiction,' *Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*. Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1914, p. 223. This *kyaungdaik* would remain the refuge for the rioters until the end of the disturbances in Rangoon.

kyaungdaik as a refuge, untouched by the police, is a controversial issue. The police guarded the monastery gates while arms and missiles continued to be sent out from Thayettaw Kyaungdaik to support those outside who were still assaulting Indians.³⁵ But there was also increasing aggression towards the police. Through the night of 26 July, stones were thrown at the police who were guarding the monastery, from both inside and outside the *kyaungdaik*, and some Indian constables were charged and assaulted by the crowd. At the intersection of Godwin Road and Canal Street, one Indian policeman was severely beaten and later died in hospital, while a European sergeant was stabbed, and 37 other police officers were injured in a clash with the mob.³⁶ Even after the disturbances ended a few days later, there were still sporadic attacks by gangs of Burmans on the houses of police officers in the Rangoon suburbs.³⁷

The situation became even more tense following the occupation of the Thayettaw Kyaungdaik. On 28 July, it was reported that there had been 27 lootings and nine serious attacks on Indians in the city, although many further cases were apparently unreported.³⁸ With damage to their properties, persons, and morale, the Indians began to respond to the attacks and assaults. Two days after the mass rally at Shwedagon Pagoda, communal

³⁵ *FRREC*, p. 32.

³⁶ Copy of personal letter from Sir A. Cochrane to Lord Zetland dated 30 July 1938, in Burma Situation Reports; and "Riot in the City," *Rangoon Gazette*, 28 July 1938.

³⁷ W.H. Tydd, *Peacock Dreams*, pp.131-2.

³⁸ *FRREC*, p. 34.

violence broke out again in central Rangoon but this time led by Muslims. A *pongyi* was stabbed by a gang of Indians. Then, as the exhausted military police were withdrawn from the city, there were Indian attacks on Burmese individuals and their properties. The Commissioner of Police called for reinforcements from the military police and the army units at Syriam, Pyawbwe, and Mandalay. But these reinforcements could provide the city with only six hundred military police and soldiers.³⁹ Despite a 'Shoot to Kill' order, a prohibition on gatherings of more than five people, and the reinforced presence of the armed military police and the army, communal disturbances, including assaults on women and children, continued, particularly in side streets and small alleys.⁴⁰ The Governor insisted that the only way to stop looting, vandalism, and murder was to open fire on the rampaging gangs.⁴¹ Nevertheless, violent assaults on both Muslims and Buddhists persisted. A mosque in Myenigon, a heavily populated district close to downtown Rangoon, was burnt down while Muslims were saying their afternoon prayers. In a later report, the Central Relief Committee, an ad-hoc committee that represented the Muslim community, bitterly commented on the destruction of temples and mosques: 'the extent of the vandalism is such as cannot be found comparable to any event in modern

³⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁰ Telegrams from Reuters Special Service, 2 September 1938, 7.43 P.M., in Burma riots: situation reports.

⁴¹ Copy of personal letter from Sir A. Cochrane to Lord Zetland dated 30 July 1938, and a letter from Government of Burma to Secretary of State for Burma, 1 August 1938, 4.30 P.M., in Ibid.

history.’⁴² The military police now began to fire at looters and armed house-breakers, believing that ‘a shot in time saves nine’, while British troops were responsible for evacuating women and children from affected areas and transporting those injured to hospital.⁴³

The day after the outbreak of the riots, *Thuriya* and *New Light of Burma* published a series of photographs with descriptions of the attacks at Soortee Bara Bazaar. The Governor branded the photographs and the descriptions ‘wild statements and objectionable photographs.’⁴⁴ Twenty four hours after the photographs were published in *Thuriya* and *New Light of Burma*, the situation in Rangoon remained intense. By that point, the government and the Muslim community were fully aware that the vernacular press was stoking up the violence.

Although sporadic assaults and attacks continued, by the end of July, the violence had begun to diminish in Rangoon. But it broke out afresh in Mandalay and in six districts in Lower Burma on 30 July, when police were compelled to fire into the crowd. Despite a relative calm in Rangoon and elsewhere throughout August, violence resumed on 2 September when two Indian boys were attacked by a group of Burmese, including Buddhist

⁴² Memorandum submitted by the Central Relief Committee to the Burma Riots Enquiry Committee.

⁴³ Telegrams from Reuters Special Service, 28 July 1938, 6.14 P.M. and 29 July 1938, 7.19 P.M., in Burma riots: situation reports.

⁴⁴ A personal letter, A.D. Cochrane, Governor of Burma, to Marquess of Zetland, 30 July 1938, National Library of Scotland, Acc 10218, Box 11 (3).

monks, in downtown Rangoon. Though the boys were not seriously wounded, the incident raised tension between the two communities once again. Violence resumed but lasted for just one day: four Burmans were killed, seven injured, while one Indian was killed and five wounded. In the following week, there were further eruptions of violence between Indians and Burmans. The police, it was reported, were completely unprepared to confront the resumed violence, because the attacks occurred simultaneously throughout Rangoon. The disturbances began to diminish on 5 September with the intervention of the armed military police but, in reality, distrust and suspicion remained undiminished. Since the beginning of the riots in July, 4,132 people had been arrested, of whom 2,028 were sent for trial.⁴⁵ To prevent further tension, the Governor decided to use the special powers conferred on him by the Government of Burma Act, 1935. On 9 September, the Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act, 1938 (RESA) was introduced. The Act would remain in force for 5 years. In his letter to the Secretary of State for Burma, the Governor explained:

The first series of disturbances had been suppressed, though with some difficulty, by use of the ordinary powers conferred by law on the Police, but the second series appeared to present certain features which distinguished them from the earlier trouble. In July rioting and looting were apparently in the main the result of an outburst of popular feeling against Mohamedans, and though hooligans on both sides doubtless did much to aggravate the trouble, they were not the only offenders. There seems little doubt on the other hand that the disturbances in September were largely the work of Burman

⁴⁵ Telegram, Governor of Burma to Education, Health and Lands Department, India, 9 September 1938, in Burma riots: situation reports.

and Mohamedan badmashes who were determined to retaliate for every outrage committed by the other side in the quarrel. It became clear that the only effective method of dealing with this situation was to round up badmashes and that the ordinary powers to arrest were not wide enough to enable the Police to do so. Section 3 (I) of the Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act, 1938, gives them the necessary powers.⁴⁶

The act allowed the police to hold those in possession of weapons without a magistrate's order for up to 15 days. Furthermore, additional military police and soldiers, as well as the armed Frontier Force, were ordered into Rangoon to suppress both the anti-Muslim rioters and those who had simply seized the opportunity to loot.⁴⁷ Another preventive measure embedded in the Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act, 1938, was the Governor's power to censor provocative materials published by the vernacular press. Maung Shwe Hpi's book had been proscribed on 26 July, although there had been a delay in banning its circulation.⁴⁸ The publication of *Thuriya* was suspended at the beginning of August while *Saithan*, a tri-weekly newspaper, was ordered to provide surety of 3,000 rupees following its publication of provocative editorials.⁴⁹ Though RESA, the Rangoon (Emergency) Security

⁴⁶ A. D. Cochrane, Governor of Burma, to the Marquess of Zetland, Secretary of State for Burma, undated, in Ibid.

⁴⁷ Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act, 1938, in Ibid.

⁴⁸ Governor A. D. Cochrane to Marquess of Zetland, Secretary of State for Burma, 30 July 1938, National Library of Scotland, Acc 10218, Box 11 (3).

⁴⁹ Telegrams from Reuters Special Service, 5 August 1938, 11.53 A.M., and 17 August 1938, 7.47 P.M., in Burma riots: situation reports.

Act, was thought by the Governor of Burma to be absolutely essential in order to restore public calm, the legislation was much criticized back in Britain. Sir Berriedale Keith, a professor of Sanskrit at the University of Edinburgh and an expert on the law of India and the British Empire, argued that it would undermine the transfer of power to local governments as envisaged in the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.⁵⁰

Despite some opposition in Britain, the Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act was well received in Burma even by the vernacular press. *New Burma*, for example, clearly supported the legislation:

It must be admitted that the public tranquility and the security of life and property in the city have been endangered since the outbreak of the riots... However much we may be jealous of our civil liberties, it is rather difficult to object to such legislation, which has for its object the rounding up of notorious and nefarious characters with a view to restoring public peace and security.⁵¹

But prior to the introduction of the Rangoon Security Act in September 1938, the British had considered a number of other preventive measures, an 'instant' formula to suppress the rioters and looters. On occasion, the forces of order opened fire on rioters. Moreover, the authorities attempted to use

⁵⁰ Professor Sir A. Berriedale Keith to the Secretary of Myochit Party, 30 September 1938, in Burma riots: Governor's use of emergency powers; enactment of Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act: IOLR/M/3/515.

⁵¹ "Police and Emergency Powers – Opinion of Burmese Press," *Rangoon Gazette*, 19 September 1938.

sections 24 and 25 of the Rangoon Police Act, which permitted 'the Government to take punitive measures in case of rioting or general disorder, and to obtain damages for those injured or looted in certain areas, from the residents of that area.' These sections had been widely used in India and in the districts in Burma. But the circumstances of Rangoon, where more than half of the population was Indian, were far different. For example, many Rangoon areas were predominantly occupied by Indian residents, almost all of whom were innocent. To force innocent Indian residents to pay for the damage caused by Burmese rioters would be inappropriate.⁵²

As a result, the martial law enforced in Rangoon was not fully employed in the districts. Larger districts, particularly Tharrawaddy, Mandalay, and Magwe, with fewer Indian residents, a weaker police presence, and often infected by false rumours from Rangoon, saw continuing communal conflict. In Mandalay, disturbances broke out three days after the first violence occurred in Rangoon, and continued until the beginning of October. The rioting broke out in central Mandalay near the Zagyo market, when a group of *pongyis* and laymen attacked Indians and their shops. In the evening a number of Indians, including women, children, and a few Indian military police, were severely wounded by armed rioters, and many Indian houses were attacked. The civil and military police, including the District Superintendent of Police himself, began shooting at looters after the rioters refused to disperse.⁵³ Patrols, both on foot and with vehicles, were much in

⁵² Memorandum submitted by the Central Relief Committee to the Burma Riots Enquiry Committee, p. 28.

⁵³ *FRREC*, pp. 163-64.

evidence and both Indians and Burmans in possession of weapons were arrested. Meanwhile, leaflets were distributed in Mandalay describing Muslims as 'blood suckers' and, as previously in Rangoon, urging Burmans to boycott Indian goods and reject inter-marriage.⁵⁴ Almost as soon as the leaflets appeared, another phase of rioting began, and a number of Muslim funerals were attacked by mobs of Burmans. Elsewhere, an Indian shop was surrounded by a large group of Burmans (claimed to be four to five hundred strong), who began throwing stones and then broke into and looted the premises.⁵⁵ The disturbances in Upper Burma followed the pattern from Rangoon, that is they were short-lived but each clash produced yet more communal resentment. The most serious violence in Rangoon and elsewhere in Lower Burma had faded by September 1938, notably after Shwe Hpi's trial.⁵⁶ But the ill-feeling remained.

Early in 1939, the ethnic tension and violence returned to Mandalay. On 10 February 1939, more than 10,000 protestors, a large number of whom were *pongyis* and students, formed a procession at Eindawya Pagoda in Mandalay. The objectives of the protestors were clear: to 'intimidate' the government and then to demand the release of five people, some of whom were leading *pongyis*, who had been arrested a few days earlier on the charge of committing 'criminal acts in pursuance of the campaign of picketing and

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

⁵⁶ "Shwe Hpi's Trial to Commence at Mandalay Today," *Rangoon Gazette*, 19 September 1938, Editorial p. 21.

boycotting Indian shops.⁵⁷ Schools were forced to close for safety and because of a student strike. The protesters also condemned the diarchy system of government imposed on Burma, the 'Shoe Question',⁵⁸ and the long-standing foreign economic domination of Burma which, they believed

⁵⁷ Extract from Governor's Confidential Report No. 4, dated 16 February 1939, in Mandalay Incident Enquiry Committee Ordinance (Ordinance II 1939): IOLR/M/3/614.

⁵⁸ This controversial issue often led the British and 'Anglicized' British subjects into conflict with Buddhist Burmans. According to the Burmese Buddhist custom, one must take off one's footwear, whether Burmese-style sandals or military boots, upon entering Buddhist temples and shrines (or even Burmese houses). Not familiar with such customs, British officials and soldiers often dismissed the custom and entered a monastery with their shoes on. Buddhists took this as a severe insult to their religion. The 'Shoe Question' had been first raised around 1910 with articles appearing in an English-language journal, *The Burman*, which outlined the *shiko* and shoe removing customs of Burma. See The Burma Social Association, *The Shoe and the Shiko – being a compilation of the shiko literature in Burma*. Rangoon: The Irrawaddy Press, 1913. In 1918 the issue was raised once again, this time in the *Rangoon Gazette Weekly Budget*, in lengthy letters to the editor. In one instance, when Lieutenant-Governor Sir Reginald Craddock prepared to visit Shwe Hmaw-Daw Pagoda, Buddhists in Pegu were drawn into 'exciting discussions', fearing that the Lieutenant-Governor would wear his shoes on the platform of the pagoda. When the trustees of the pagoda insisted that the notice board prohibiting shoe-wearing in the pagoda precinct be removed, another Buddhist association protested. From 1916, the YMBA (Young Men's Buddhist Association) had vigorously campaigned against the refusal of foreigners to remove shoes. This was now a major nationalist issue. See 'A Review of the Shoe Question, to the Editor, Rangoon Gazette', *Rangoon Gazette Weekly Budget*, 1 April 1918, p. 2: and Emma Larkin, "The Self-Conscious Censor: Censorship in Burma under the British, 1900-1939," *Journal of Burma Studies*. 8 (2003), p. 80.

'has made the people of Burma poor.'⁵⁹ Due to the 'defiant and stubborn attitude of the mob,'⁶⁰ the government decided to call in the military police and the Burma Rifles from Maymyo. Despite warnings and orders to disperse, the protestors made no sign of retreat. Then the Burma Rifles, on the orders of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, began using tear gas⁶¹ and fired 17 rounds into the mob, killing at least 14 and leaving 19 wounded.⁶²

The vernacular press in Mandalay, spearheaded by the *Mandalay Sun*, whose tone was usually less belligerent than that of most newspapers in Rangoon, compared the incident in Mandalay to the Amritsar Massacre.⁶³ But the tension in Mandalay was even more dramatically heightened by the publication of a pamphlet entitled 'Mandalay Massacre'. The pamphlet was

⁵⁹ Mandalay Incident Enquiry Committee Ordinance (Ordinance II 1939), Exhibit B – The District Superintendent of Police by Ba Ba, Detective Inspector of Police.

⁶⁰ Exhibit A. Intelligence Branch Department No. 647-V.-20, dated 12 February 1939, from the District Superintendent of Police, Mandalay, to the Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Burma, Special Report on the Mass Procession on 10 February 1939, in Ibid.

⁶¹ Tear gas was first used in Burma during the communal riots in Rangoon in 1938. W.H. Tydd recalled that when tear gas was first introduced to Burma from India, it had been used in India only a few times and a tear-gas expert had to be urgently flown to Burma to instruct the police: W.H. Tydd, *Peacock Dreams*, p. 133.

⁶² Extract from Governor's Confidential Report No. 4, dated 16 February 1939, in Mandalay Incident Enquiry Committee Ordinance.

⁶³ Exhibit 1U1, taken from *Mandalay Sun*, undated, in Ibid.

published by a *sangha* (ecclesiastical) association later in 1939. In one paragraph, the author, referring to the editor of the *Mandalay Sun*, wrote:

The number of troops employed, the time and the manner of arrest, the inclusion of Civil and Military European Officers for the arrest of three mere school boys seemed amusing to some, but the thoughtful Editor of the Mandalay "Sun" sounded a note of warning to the Deputy Commissioner and the District Superintendent of Police that the nervous and alarmist Police reports needed scrutiny before credence was given to them.⁶⁴

The government's reaction to the publication of this pamphlet was harsh. Sir John Clague, the Adviser to the Secretary of State for Burma from 1937 to 1942, strongly condemned the pamphlet, claiming that the Burman was 'generally a poor liar. Here is not below his usual standard of unconvincing perversion.'⁶⁵

Further north, in Shwebo, not only were students and monks protesting, but cultivators joined in, marching and shouting nationalist slogans and refusing to pay taxes.⁶⁶ Indians in Mandalay and other towns in Upper Burma were harassed: Indian shops were picketed, sometimes looted, and Indian and British goods were widely boycotted. Indian houses and quarters were set on fire and Burmans were strongly advised by anonymous posters and by word of mouth not to assist the affected Indians in their neighbourhood.

⁶⁴ Ratanabon Rahanpyo Association and the Executive Committee of Mandalay Shooting. *Mandalay Massacre*, Mandalay: Burmese Cinema Press, 1939, in Ibid.

⁶⁵ Minute Paper, B. 3703/39, dated 17 May 1939, in Ibid.

⁶⁶ Daily Situation Report in the districts, dated 15 February 1939, in Ibid.

The police in a communal context

The Aga Khan, one of the founders of the All-India Muslim League, had urged Indian Muslims in Burma to stay calm and to 'respect the customs and faith of the people among whom they live.'⁶⁷ But during the disturbances, the Governor of Burma received a large number of complaints from various Indian groups, including from legislative assemblies across India. Indians both in Burma and in India were angered, not only by the violence their countrymen had to face but also because, in their eyes, the colonial authorities were failing to protect the community.⁶⁸ The Government of India, Department of Education, Health, and Land reported back to the Secretary of State for India:

Recent Burma riots aroused both interest and anxiety in India. Last week we answered short notice question in the Assembly, giving such facts regular course of events and situation at the time as Government of Burma had supplied to us. Batches of refugees, who have since landed in Madras and Calcutta, have brought back reports of inadequate handling of the situation by the authorities in Burma, resulting in heavy loss of life and property among Indians and widespread destitution among the poorer classes of Indians. These reports are probably exaggerated but they have given rise to demand in India for searching enquiry into all aspects of the outbreak. ... As Indian Mussalmans appear to have suffered most, feeling more [among] their co-religionists is said to be strong and it is

⁶⁷ Telegram from Reuters Special Service, 30 June 1938, 6.57 P.M., in Burma riots: situation reports.

⁶⁸ 'Indian's Fear in Burma,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 September 1938, in Ibid.

probable that Mussulman Muslims [sic] opinion throughout India may be aroused.⁶⁹

One determined view on the riots in Burma was provided by Moulvi Abdur Rasheed Chaudhury, a Muslim member of the Indian Legislative Assembly, who urged that Indian troops be sent to Burma to protect Indian interests. Another member complained that the police, although predominantly made up of Indian subordinate constables, were reluctant to give protection to the Indian population.⁷⁰ But in fact Indian reaction was far from united, perhaps reflecting the various racial and religious backgrounds among the Indian populations in both Burma and India itself but also a consequence of the different channels through which the rioting was reported. Most Indians and Europeans in India were informed of the situation in Burma through the English-medium press, sometimes by radio. The English-medium press focused on the alleged incompetence of the Burma Police when faced with an extremely tense situation. The press in Britain took a similar view. The *Manchester Guardian*, four months after the riot took place, commented on the reported views of the Governor of Burma:

Sir Archibald Cochrane, the Governor of Burma, [sees the rioting] to be mainly 'the result of an outburst of popular feeling against the Mohammedans', though aggravated by

⁶⁹ Telegram from Government of India, Department of Education, Health and Land, to the Secretary of State for India, 21 August 1938, in *Ibid*.

⁷⁰ Summary of Extracts from the Debates in the Indian Legislative Assembly on the Burma riots, with particular reference to the representations that the Government of India were asked to make to the Secretary of State, in *Burma riots: Governor's use of emergency powers; enactment of Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act*.

hooligans. On the other hand, he considers the rioting which broke out afresh in September to be largely due to Burman and Mohamedan hooligans out for revenge. Neither Burmans nor Indians will be much consoled at this interpretation. The Indians in particular have complained that in spite of Rangoon's known character for communal rioting the mob was able to terrorise the city for several days. There is blame on all sides, but until the full facts are known, it is important to apportion it justly.⁷¹

Harsh criticism of the police for their response to the riots was voiced by both Indians and Europeans. Despite a large number of Indian civil police, the Rangoon Town police, as well as the auxiliary military police, the number of police was insufficient at crucial points.⁷² In other words, the police made no firm attempt to suppress the rioting, although the aggressively hostile Burmese press alleged that the police had used great violence. Moreover, there were few prosecutions compared to the number of arrests: most monks and politicians were released without charge.

The report of the Central Relief Committee, written by an Indian, S.A.S. Tyalyi, suggests that the police response was 'open to grave criticism'. First and most importantly, the police failed to give protection to the general public. No action was taken, for example, to prevent angry Burmese from looting, wounding, or even murdering innocent Indians and others. In one

⁷¹ "Burma Riots: July-Sept 1938: Additional Powers for Police – Enactment of Rangoon (E) Security Act (V of 1938)," *Manchester Guardian*, 18 November 1938.

⁷² Memorandum submitted by the Central Relief Committee to the Burma Riots Enquiry Committee, and Summary of Extracts from the Debates of the Indian Legislative Assembly on the Burma Riots.

instance, in the midst of the riot, a Japanese cotton company was looted and damaged in spite of repeated requests from the Japanese Consul for protection of Japanese interests. The authorities admitted: that 'the amount of protection available was small is unfortunately true. It must also be accepted that the Police in Rangoon were not immediately aware of the seriousness of the situation and failed to take the most effective measures.'⁷³ In the districts, the police were known to have encouraged looters.⁷⁴ In many instances, although informed early, the police arrived late at the scene of looting, killing, and the destruction of mosques.⁷⁵ The incident at Thayettaw Kyaungdaik, in particular, raised serious questions as to the police determination to control the riots. As described earlier, when the police had forced the Burmese rioters to retreat, the crowd had entered the *kyaungdaik*. The police, it was claimed, did nothing to arrest the culprits, since the rioters had entered a religious place: 'These facts will clearly go to show that if law and order is to be administered by the Buddhist Ministry, the Buddhists and especially those in yellow robes will be exempt from arrest and punishment as provided by Law.'⁷⁶ One shocked comment from the Indian side suggested

⁷³ Draft of letter to the Japanese Consul [unknown sender and undated] and a letter from T. Inoue, the Secretary of the Japanese Consulate in Rangoon [unknown recipient], 7 October 1940, in Burma riots: situation reports.

⁷⁴ Letter from "The Burma Minorities Union" to the Governor of Burma, undated, in Ibid.

⁷⁵ Memorandum submitted by the Central Relief Committee to the Burma Riots Enquiry Committee.

⁷⁶ Letter from "The Burma Minorities Union" to the Governor of Burma.

that some officials in the Burmese Central Intelligence Department had not informed their superiors of the details of the riots and the rioters.⁷⁷

Throughout the 1930s, Indians had attracted great hostility in Burma, understandably so at a time of considerable social and economic unrest. It was therefore claimed by the Central Relief Committee that, during the riots, Burman police officers failed to record the complaints made by the Indian victims. They cared little, it was argued.⁷⁸ In addition, the Riot Enquiry Committee itself was accused of being biased against the Indians: and it was pointed out that many Burmans were arrested but few sent for trial.⁷⁹ The Committee insisted that the 1938 riots were sparked by political intrigue on the part of Burmese nationalist politicians rather than by actual grievances. Thus the Indian Muslims, knowing that Maung Shwe Hpi's book could cause communal trouble, in fact made sure that the offensive passages had been removed before the rioting broke out in July.⁸⁰

The Indians in Burma, including the Zerbadi, reacted strongly, not only to the loss of property and life but also from fear that their position in Burma was now seriously threatened. Moreover, the Indians were convinced that the community had not received adequate protection from the police, and

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Memorandum submitted by the Central Relief Committee to the Burma Riots Enquiry Committee.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

wrote strongly to the authorities and to the newspapers. A letter from the Burma Minorities Union was sent to the Governor, Cochrane. The letter blamed the Burmese Buddhists or, in their own words, the [Buddhist] 'aggressors' for the riot. The letter also alleged that the press had incited the riot. Neither Burmese nationalist organizations nor Maung Shwe Hpi's book were to be blamed. The letter then criticized the police:

we beg to point out that only some of the European police officers and in very rare cases some Burmese officers did their duty, as should be expected of any dutiful officer. On the whole it appears that Burmese Buddhist officers and policemen directly or indirectly encouraged the Burmese hooligans to lawlessness throughout. We also notice with regret that some of the European officers who did their duty loyally, as any good Britishers would do, were transferred for having done their duty.⁸¹

The letter was also more broadly critical of the authorities:

Your Excellency must, by this time, have come to realise that in Burma, so-called official secrets seem to be the property of everyone in the streets and Bazaars. Further, rumours says [sic], the Burmese C.I.D. [Central Intelligence Department] officers and Police do not keep the higher authorities informed of schemes and plans to embarrass or otherwise overthrow the British Raj.⁸²

⁸¹ Letter from the Burma Minorities Union to the Governor of Burma.

⁸² Ibid.

The alleged incompetence of the authorities was most clearly seen in the events at Thayettaw Kyaungdaik. An anonymous reader's letter (almost certainly an Indian from the tone of the letter) sent to the *Rangoon Gazette* claimed that after part of the crowd had escaped the police charge into the monastery, the police did nothing except keep an eye on the entrance. Yet all the time, the monastery was being used as a warehouse for looted goods and weapons. The Burma Minorities Union letter concluded: 'we the law abiding citizens, would also have to fall in with the views of the European correspondent to the Rangoon Gazette and think that there are different kinds of law for different classes of people.'⁸³

There was also great concern on the part of officials. In a private letter to the Governor in December 1938, Sir Walter Booth-Gravely referred to a private discussion he had had with the Superintendent of Police at Toungoo, Taik Tun Gale. It would appear that the police, long before the riot had erupted, had expected violence as a result of press agitation against the government. More interestingly, Taik Tun Gale had argued that the police and the Criminal Investigation Department, the eyes and ears of the authorities, did not work together closely. In other words, the police were not supplied with efficient intelligence.

On the subject of the Criminal Investigation Department, Taik Tun Gale was frankly of the view that the C.I.D. as at present constituted is of comparative little use. He points out (what I know to be perfectly true) that in former days when the C.I.D. had a great deal to do with Indian plots and so on, a large

⁸³ A reader's letter to *Rangoon Gazette* dated 28 September 1938, in Burma riots: situation reports.

proportion of the C.I.D. were Indians. Now, as Taik Tun Gale says with some truth, the C.I.D. is largely Karen in composition and largely selected with a view to its expertness at football. Taik Tun Gale criticises strongly the permanent presence more or less in charge of the working of the Department of an Indian Deputy Superintendent of Police. Taik Tun Gale has nothing to say against Mr Bhattacharjee's capacity or work, except that he is not suited for dealing with present day problems of Burman underhand politics and intrigues especially in relation to the priesthood. Taik Tun Gale states also that it is impossible for Karens to understand the significance of some of the Burmese fables and so on which are reproduced in the Burmese Press. As an instance of these, he quotes an account of a massacre which occurred in Ceylon and another account of the death of the Governor of Syriam, both of which he said were calculated to have a great effect on Burma sentiment . . .⁸⁴

While the Criminal Investigation Department contained no high-ranking Burman officer, the nature of its work required a great deal of local knowledge. The Karen and Indian CID officers had little or no inside knowledge on Burman society. Taik Tun Gale advised that one Burman officer in the CID should be an *ex-pongyi* who could understand the press and nationalist political discussions.⁸⁵ According to Taik Tun Gale, the monks were to blame for the communal riots. Under Dr. Ba Maw, who was a Catholic, discipline among *pongyis* and control over the religious orders had been neglected. In fact the Superintendent of Police had argued that the

⁸⁴ Private and Personal letter from Sir Walter Booth-Gravely, the Counsellor to the Defence Department, to Governor, Sir A.D. Cochrane, 7 December 1938: National Library of Scotland, Acc 10218, Box 9 (3).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

government should act as a patron of Buddhism by donating rice and other essentials to monasteries.⁸⁶

Another important issue was the lack of government-owned newspapers. Although the English-language *Rangoon Gazette* had long acted as the voice of the government, it did not back the government over its failed handling of the riots. Consequently the authorities had no platform in the press to contradict the ferocious rumours that fuelled much of the violence.

Conclusion

Burma's police struggled to contain the political and social turbulence of the last full decade of British rule. They were strongly criticized for, at various times, ruthlessness and indifference, and it was commonly argued that they were inadequately trained and prepared. But the key issue was that Burma's police comprised British officers and Indian constables, and was therefore structurally incapable of controlling late colonial Burma's fierce communal tensions, which had deeply-set economic and political origins. In fact relatively few Indian or British police were prepared, in these circumstances, to serve long in Burma, and that in itself weakened the force and undermined its attempts to maintain the social and political order.

In view of the fact that the police forces of colonial Burma were racially constructed and given too Burma's severe racial tensions in the 1930s, it could be argued the Burma police were left in an impossible position. The

⁸⁶ Private and Personal letter from Sir Walter Booth-Gravely, the Counsellor to the Defence Department, to Governor, Sir A.D. Cochrane, 9 December 1938: National Library of Scotland, Acc 10218, Box 9 (3).

police found themselves acting as a force for order but caught between the rebellious Burmans and the often ruthless British administration. And to the extent that the police were seen by the Burmans as an Indian instrument of British rule, they caught in full the growing Burman hostility towards both the British and the Indians. There could be no question, in those circumstances, of the police staying apart from the tensions within the society it policed. No police force stands separate from society.

Conclusion:

Wartime Reflections on the Post-war Reconstruction of the Burma Police

By the time Britain declared war on Germany following Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939, Japan was fighting in a series of conflicts with China – known as the Second Sino-Japanese War – which had broken out afresh in 1937. The British in India and Burma were aware of the rising military ambitions of the Japanese but never really expected a Japanese invasion of Burma because, as it was argued, compared to the large colonial ports like Singapore and Calcutta, Rangoon was strategically insignificant.¹

However, precautionary measures were taken by the British government in Burma. After the 1938 communal violence, the government sought to strengthen law and order through a combined use of new legislation and the armed forces, including the armed civil police. A plan, known as the 'Defence of Burma', introduced to the Burma Legislature by the Governor, Sir Archibald Cochrane, in September 1938, was precipitated by fear of war and Burma's separation from India. Separation had given the government of Burma greater freedom to shape its own policy, to reflect the circumstances of Burma itself. This culminated in the Defence of Burma Act,

¹ Maurice Collis, *Last and First in Burma (1941-1948)*. London: Faber and Faber, 1956, pp. 18-20.

1940, which aimed to strengthen national unity and internal defence by banning the more violent nationalist organizations. The scheme proposed that the armed police and the armed forces ought to be treated as a single unit in maintaining 'internal security' – a term that would be widely used in this period – and, crucially, that this would be accompanied by a gradual Burmanization of the police and armed forces.²

Following Burma's separation from India in 1937, there was a significant change in the British attitude towards internal security, which relied heavily on the loyalty and efficiency of the indigenous police. In order to secure that loyalty and, ultimately, an orderly and peaceful society, the government would need to increase its expenditure on the police very substantially.³ In early 20th-century England, public funds were first and foremost used to guarantee law and order. But in spite of the growing tension between the colonial government and Burmese nationalists, and the increase of crime, the number of police in Rangoon in 1940, for example, was less than in 1923.⁴ It was now essential, despite commonly expressed fears and doubts, to give more opportunities for Burmese to rise to the higher ranks formerly occupied exclusively by European officers, and to recruit soldiers for the Burma Army primarily from among the Burmese:

² 'The Defence of Burma,' *Rangoon Gazette*, 5 September 1938, p. 2.

³ Burma Police Reconstruction, Summary of the Preliminary Review, Part I – Conditions affecting the individual police officer, in Future Administration of the Burma Police, 3362/46: IOLR/M/4/1796.

⁴ Ibid.

That the Burmese should take eventually a leading part in the defence of Burma is a necessary corollary to the policy which gives them self-government. The Burmese consider themselves to have the capacity of good soldiers, and we accept that estimate. Up till now there has been difficulty in the recruitment and the fostering of the military spirit in modern conditions among the Burmese, as shown by their fewness in the ranks of the Burma defence forces. But this is in course of being altered.⁵

As the war broke out in Europe following by the Japanese occupation of Burma from 1942, the Burmese government-in-exile in Simla, persistent on the pre-war idea to add Burmese elements to the nation's internal security and to strongly adhere to 'correct past abuses and defects,'⁶ began to draw up plans to rebuild the Burma police after the war. The pre-war government had proposed the integration of the police into a large, armed 'striking force': but, crucially, the wartime government of Burma under Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith saw the Burma police differently. In a lengthy and important letter written in June 1943 to L.S. Amery, the Secretary of State for India and Burma, Sir Reginald stressed the importance of the police in the process of re-occupation and reconstruction in Burma. In broader outline, the reconstruction of Burma was a temporary plan that would ensure flow of administration in preparation for Burma's full self-government.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J.S. Furnivall. *Reconstruction in Burma*. S.I.: s.n., 1943, p. 1. This preliminary report would be greatly expanded into Furnivall's monumental work, *Colonial Policy and Practice: a comparative study of Burma and Netherlands India*, in 1948.

However, the wish to revive the country's economy and, more importantly perhaps, the British pride in Burma could never be fulfilled without looking back to the pre-war era – not at the glory of British imperialism and commercial prosperity but to figure out what exactly went wrong in the administration of Burma and the police. The process of planning reconstruction encouraged a measure of reflection as to the weaknesses and failures of pre-war administration. J. S. Furnivall, the prominent British-Burma scholar-official, to reiterate the Governor's viewpoint, emphasized that the growth in crime had been the most disturbing characteristic of modern Burma.⁷ Hence, reconstruction involved not simply the rebuilding of a heavily damaged infrastructure as such but also the restoration of law and order.⁸

During the Japanese occupation, from 1942 to 1945, the Japanese Kempeitai, the military police, had been responsible for day-to-day policing in urban areas. But rural Burma had been largely left to police itself. Clearly, this was a disaster. From information obtained from British intelligence operating in Burma during the war, the Governor and the newly-appointed Burma Police Reconstruction Committee in Simla were struck by the crime-ridden character of Burmese society in the countryside:

⁷ J.S. Furnivall, *Reconstruction in Burma*, p. 16.

⁸ Despatch No. 30, from Governor of Burma to L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for Burma, Simla, 30 June 1943, in *Future administration of the Burma Police*, p. 1.

There are few countries, particularly peaceful agricultural countries, where the life and property of the country dweller and latterly of townsmen, were less secure than in Burma and where so little had been achieved in the name of law and order in the last half century.⁹

The Governor hoped that the Committee would fulfill three tasks: to set the annual expenditure of the police; to review the internal organization of the police, including pay rates, lodging, clothing and accoutrements, and equipment; and finally to consider the required strength of the police in order to secure maximum benefit.¹⁰

The Committee was chaired by Sir Herbert Dunkley, the Chief Justice, and contained eight prominent British and Burmese members as follows: U Tin Tut,¹¹ U Kyaw Min,¹² Colonel M.L. Treston,¹³ Lieutenant Colonel A.

⁹ Burma Police Reconstruction, Summary of the Preliminary Review, Part I – Conditions affecting the individual police officer, Introductory.

¹⁰ Despatch No. 30, from Governor of Burma to L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for Burma, Simla, 30 June 1943, Strength of the Force.

¹¹ The first Burmese to become an Indian Civil Service officer. He would later serve as the first Foreign Minister of the Union of Burma and the Minister of Finance under Aung San's pre-independence administration.

¹² An Arakanese who was later appointed the Joint Secretary to the Government of Burma, Reconstruction Department.

¹³ Inspector-General of Civil Hospitals and Director of Medical Services (Civil Defence) of Burma.

Campbell,¹⁴ C.J. Richards,¹⁵ R.T. Stoneham,¹⁶ R.G.B. Prescott,¹⁷ and R.E. McGuire,¹⁸ with U Kyaw as Secretary. Initial proposals were made by R.G.B. Prescott, the Reconstruction Officer (Police) since December 1942. To consider the future arrangement of the Burma police, the Committee inevitably reflected to a degree on past faults.

The Committee thus sought to identify those pre-war weaknesses that had contributed to the inefficiency of the police, and then propose remedial action.¹⁹ Through reports from British intelligence, the Simla government learned that crime rates in Burma under the Japanese had greatly increased despite the Japanese' heavy punishment upon those who violated their criminal law. The Governor argued that the anarchy that had marked the Japanese occupation and which now threatened social disintegration would

¹⁴ A reconstruction officer (Education).

¹⁵ A renowned long-standing I.C.S. officer who also wrote about Burma: *The Burman: An Appreciation* (1945) and *Burma Retrospect and Other Sketches* (1951).

¹⁶ Became the adviser for Burma Industrial Rehabilitation and Development towards the end of the Japanese Occupation in early 1945.

¹⁷ Chief of Police, Civil Affairs Service.

¹⁸ Became the Deputy Director of Civil Affairs, British Military Administration in 1945, Divisional Commissioner, Burma, between 1946 and 1947, and finally, Secretary to Governor of Burma in 1947.

¹⁹ *Report of the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee* [no date and printing place given], p. 1: IOLR/M/4/1796.

require the immediate establishment of an efficient police force: he announced that policing would be 'a matter of most serious concern to my Government' after the war.²⁰

The Committee was appointed on the assumption that a 'primary function of organized Government is the maintenance of law and order; and for the effective discharge of this function an efficient, adequately manned and adequately equipped police force is a primary necessity.'²¹ In looking back at past defects, the Police Reconstruction Committee focused on the pre-war failures in internal police administration, confusion in the command hierarchy, and the difficulties created by external interference, usually from magistrates, that undermined police morale and discipline.²²

The final report of the committee was composed of two parts: Part I – Conditions affecting the individual police officer; and Part II – Administration and Organisation. Part I took the committee back to key issues that affected each police officer and constable as an individual. The issues included pay, superannuation and retiring benefits, leave, medical attention, travelling allowances, housing, uniform and equipment, strength, and public relations. The problem here was a lack of adequate financial

²⁰ Despatch No. 30, from Governor of Burma to L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for Burma, Simla, 30 June 1943, p. 1.

²¹ *Report of the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee*, p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

resources and a long-term deterioration in the circumstances and working conditions of the police.

The committee argued that the inefficiency of the Burma police was rooted in the substantial differences in pay between the police and other civil servants, and the absence of reasonable terms upon retirement. The police were responsible for protecting lives and property, and were therefore themselves frequently exposed to violence. In order to create an effective and efficient force, rates of pay, particularly for non-gazetted ranks (below the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police) must be increased.²³

In addition to the complaints of low pay and the corruption to which it had led, the absence of attractive retirement benefits and of compensation and invalid payments were also said to be sources of discontent among police officers and constables. The Committee believed that the police force, one of the most exhausting areas of colonial administration, deserved clear and fair regulations for retirement, disability pensions, and sick leave. The retirement age should be 50 for gazetted officers, and after not more than 25 years of service for non-gazetted officers, making room for younger, fitter

²³ It appears that the Police Reconstruction Committee was appointed primarily to 'review' problems in police organization and to suggest remedies but not to formulate new pay regulations. The Committee thus explained that it had not proposed new rates of pay in detail: this would be left to another committee, yet to be formed. In a similar manner, the crucial question of the strength of the police, long restricted by financial difficulties, was only briefly discussed. This detailed work would be undertaken by another standing committee, which, again, had not yet been established. *Report of the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee*, Part I, p. 2, 5.

and more active constables.²⁴ Leave rules should also be carefully reframed to guard officers from exhaustion. The Committee proposed a groundbreaking compulsory one-month annual leave for all police officers below the gazetted ranks, to maintain the health and efficiency of the police.²⁵

Another important issue which had long been debated during the various re-organizations of the police from the late 19th century was the overlapping jurisdiction between the police and the administration's judicial bodies. The Police Reconstruction Committee argued that the police had often been the victims of unjustified government criticism at the hands of Enquiry Committees:

Whatever the findings of the Committees in such cases, whether they exonerate the police or hold them blameworthy, an inevitable result has been to bring the law into contempt and to do considerable harm to the morale and prestige of the Police force. (...) in future any demand for a public enquiry into allegations that the police exceeded their powers in dealing with civil disturbances should be strongly resisted...²⁶

Part II of the report – Administration and Organisation – examined the Burma police force as an administrative structure. This section was divided into the following: Secretariat Administration, District Administration, General Organisation [(a) Police for special organisations, (b) Railway

²⁴ Ibid., Superannuation and Retiring Benefits, p. 2.

²⁵ Ibid., Leave, p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid., Public Relations, p. 5.

Police, (c) Passport and Immigration Regulations, (d) Armed Civil Police, (e) Excise Prevention Branch, and (f) Customs Preventive Services]; Departmental Organisation [(a) Deputy Inspector-General of Police, (b) Rangoon Town Police, and (c) Police Station organisation]; Recruitment Policy, Promotions, Discipline, Office Organisation, Training; Guards, Escorts and Patrols; Police Buildings, Communications and Transport, Prosecution of Cases, Detective Staff, Stolen Property and Absconders, Surveillance, Special Investigation Bureau, Intelligence, and Finger Print Bureau. Underpinning much of the discussion here was the question whether the District Magistrate should still be allowed to exert an extent of authority over the police: as the Committee saw it, that authority had been far too great in the past. Some members thought that there should be no such intervention, and that the District Magistrate should only be consulted by the District Superintendent of Police, and then only when necessary. The Inspector-General of Police alone should supervise and manage the work of the police. This implied the abolition of the military police.

An armed reserve for the Civil Police is necessary in every district and in every important headquarters. The old Military Police under Military officers were a well-disciplined and reliable force. Their training, however, was not specialized in such a way as to be of maximum benefit in their function of providing an armed reserve for use in civil disturbances. They were over-trained militarily. They were regarded as soldiers and were officered by Military officers who were concerned more with the preservation of their military function and their elaborate military training than with their effectiveness as reserves and helpers of the Civil Police. District Superintendents of Police were not in a position to utilize them freely and to the best advantage, e.g. on casual patrols, casual

guard duties, etc. The Military Police under their semi-independent Military control should be abolished.²⁷

In post-war Burma, the Committee argued, the police, under its Inspector-General, should be given authority over the enforcement of passport regulations, the surveillance of non-British subjects, the work of the prevention division of the Excise Department, intelligence agency, and the Finger Print Bureau. The work of each Deputy Inspector-General of Police would be clearly defined to prevent an over-lapping in responsibilities and potential corruption. With respect to the policing of rural Burma, the Committee proposed that in each community, one villager, other than the headman, should be appointed to act as a liaison between the police and the village, assisting the regular police in gathering intelligence and preventing crime.²⁸

Inevitably, not all measures proposed by the Governor and the reconstruction committee were pursued in the last few years of colonial rule. Indeed the Conservative fraction in the London parliament saw the reconstruction of Burma as simply unnecessary. Money then was scarce and the extent of war-time destruction so large that the Simla administration, it was thought, should leave the task of reconstruction to Burmese politicians and, instead, should prepare for its own departure. There was fierce disagreement between Conservative and Labour MPs regarding the rehabilitation of Burma. For the former, reconstruction, if it

²⁷ Ibid., *Strength and General Organisation*, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ Ibid., *Departmental Organisation*, p. 11.

had to be pursued, should focus on those areas where the government of Burma could retain control, in agriculture, forestry, land transport, and civil supplies.²⁹ In other words, the priority would be given to economic reconstruction. Labour, in stark contrast, condemned what it saw as the return of the 'monopoly capitalists' to Burma and encouraged the achievement of self-government.³⁰

It is interesting to note, however, that at this time, J.S. Furnivall was arguing that government would fail to diminish crime in post-war Burma unless the non-material causes of crime and social ills were really understood and subdued. He explained that what was urgently needed in post-war Burma was a strengthening of public opinion and attitudes. Criminals, he argued, had long roamed about freely, and had been able to commit crime because of public sympathy and neglect. Here was an echo of an issue with which the colonial administration had heavily struggled at the end of the 19th century, its frustration that the rural Burmese were apparently reluctant to take responsibility for the prevention and detection of crime in their communities hence the impossibility for efficient policing. But Furnivall suggested that now, with reconstruction and the development of the economy and improvement in the quality of life, the Burmese population would acquire a more positive attitude towards government and greater hostility towards the criminal. Furnivall predicted

²⁹ "'Corruption' By Monopolies in Burma: Commons Charge by M.P.," *Manchester Guardian*, 7 April 1946.

³⁰ Sydney Gruson, "British Bare Burma Terror Reign; Land, Sea Forces Fight Bandits," *New York Times*, 8, June 1946.

that post-war Burma would eventually attain the social stability and safety which pre-war Burma had lacked. And, to encourage greater stability, he argued that the government should abolish many of the harsh penal measures that had marked the colonial regime.³¹

The views on the police expressed by the Simla administration-in-exile and its reconstruction planners focused on many of the key issues of policing in colonial Burma that this dissertation has attempted to explore. Sir Reginald himself argued that the gravest fault of the Burma police under British rule was their lack of prestige and the inadequate pay of subordinate police officials and constables. Even during Burma's rapidly growing prosperity in the early 20th century, the police were overlooked, sometimes looked down upon, and provided with inadequate funds and staff.³²

³¹ J.S. Furnivall, *Reconstruction in Burma*, p. 67.

³² Burma Police Reconstruction, Summary of the Preliminary Review, Part I – Conditions affecting the individual police officer. Whether the police department had been provided with adequate funds was a matter of some debate. While the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee as well as the Governor argued that the police had not been provided with adequate budgets, U Tin Tut, an Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer argued, referring to the Finance Accounts of 1939-40, that the Burma police had never faced the alleged 'financial starvation': in fact the department had received the largest share of public salaries in colonial Burma. In a similar vein, W.H. Tydd, in his memoir, noted that by the late 1930s, when he took up his appointment as the Assistant Commissioner of Police, the police annual budgets were 'so large that...we had to employ an accountant...to deal with the accounts of a large spending department.' From Notes of dissent from the Report of the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee by U Tin Tut, I.C.S., dated 29 May 1943: IOLR/M/4/1769; and W.H. Tydd, *Peacock Dreams*. London: BACSA, 1986, p. 116.

And even at the height of Burmese anti-colonial protest in the 1930s, poorly funded and understaffed, the police, especially the Burmese-oriented civil police, were largely neglected and indeed substituted by British troops and semi-military forces to maintain the political and social order. Towards the end of colonial rule in Burma, the civil police were caught between the Burmese nationalist movement and a weakened colonial administration. Thus to strengthen the police and to raise their pay and living standards would clearly be a high priority for the returning British colonial administration.

But when the British did return, the restored colonial administration was close to being overwhelmed by a continuing descent into political and social disorder. And then early in September 1946, 3,000 police constables, mostly Burmans, went on strike in Rangoon and in 5 adjacent districts, over pay and conditions. The grievances of the police strikers were said to be 'real and legitimate': government officials from other departments also moved to strike.³³ This was the first and the last substantial police strike in the history of colonial Burma. One might question why the police went on strike only at the very end of British rule, despite the fact that throughout the decades of colonial administration, the force had long been poorly paid and had suffered poor working conditions. The explanation lies largely in the heightened political tensions of that period, a greatly weakened British administration vis-à-vis a far more aggressive and powerful nationalist movement. Indeed, after confronting the police in the pre-war world, the nationalists now sought the support of the police, and that too contributed

³³ Hugh Tinker (ed.), *Burma: The Struggle for Independence 1944-1948, Volume II*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1984, pp. xiv, 3.

to the strikes of September 1946. The strikes were not simply about pay and conditions: they were also political.

The Police Reconstruction Committee had also argued that for too long, the administration had simply assumed that the police would remain loyal: 'The loyalty of [the] grossly-overworked police force was tried to the utmost, but Government and the general public took the loyalty of the force for granted, a complimentary but unsound attitude to adopt.'³⁴ Undoubtedly, the loyalty crisis of the police was also undermined by agitation on the part of an increasingly influential vernacular press. The police strike in Rangoon was relatively short-lived but, backed by an influential political organization like AFPFL, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (est. 1944), it obviously threatened to bring down the social and political order. Elements within the military police and members of the People's Volunteer Organization (PVO) were brought in to provide some basic cover for the striking police.³⁵ The strike ended in less than a month, after the government agreed to pay an additional 20 rupees a month to all civil servants whose salary was less than 250 rupees per month.³⁶

³⁴ Burma Police Reconstruction, Summary of the Preliminary Review, Part I. Conditions affecting the individual police officer, Strength.

³⁵ "Burmese Unrest," *Times*, 12 September 1946; O.M. Green, "Government to Explain Burma Plan," *The Observer*, 22 September 1946; and "Burma's Need," *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1946.

³⁶ The post-war cost of living in Rangoon was four times that of the pre-war years. Strike of Police and other Government Servants, Secretary of State's memorandum of 17

Because the local population had long been regarded by the colonial administration as disloyal and violence-prone, the September 1946 police strike forcefully strengthened that assessment. Moreover, inspired by the police strikes, workers from other branches of government now threatened to paralyse the British administration, starting with the postal and telegraph staff.³⁷

Towards the end of British rule, the ideological susceptibility and physical weaknesses of the police force had been increasingly contested and had become one of the main targets of nationalist politics, and in now drawing the force into the nationalist campaign for independence, the colonial administration was greatly demoralized. During the 1930s, the police use of firearms and other coercive methods to suppress unrest had been strongly exploited by the nationalist vernacular press and by local politicians. Specifically, *Thuriya* and *New Light of Burma* were highly critical of the violent methods being used by the police. This was a decade in which the suppression of the most serious political and social unrest was undertaken by the military police, sometimes assisted by regular troops. The immediate result, of course, was heightened nationalist anger and greater possibility for mass mobilization. But there may also have been a longer-term consequence of great importance, in the militarization of policing in post-

September 1946, Cabinet Papers: IOLR/M/4/1806; and "Rangoon Police Strike," Commons and Lords Hansard, HC Deb 4 November 1946, Vol 428, cc170-1W. Accessed 26 November 2012, https://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1946/nov/04/rangoon-police-strike.

³⁷ O.M. Green, "Government To Explain Burma Plan," *The Observer*, 22 September 1946.

war Burma.³⁸ In other words, militarization and the absorption of a military culture became the foundation of the post-independence Burma police.

In Sir Reginald's opinion, the military police rarely worked in concert with the civil police. In theory, it was an auxiliary force, and if called into action, it should report to the District Superintendent of Police. But in reality, the military police acted independently, and it was only on rare occasions that the force operated under the authority of the civil police. In the eyes of the Governor and the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee, the military police were undoubtedly dependable and useful. But its rigidly militaristic attitude and the expensive costs of maintenance did not always make it a suitable instrument to control civil disturbances in a period of heightened nationalism. In other words, perhaps Burma approaching the middle of the 20th century no longer required an armed force with strict military training but an effectively armed, properly trained, and practical civil police.

And there remained the long-standing problem of the difficult relations between the police and the judicial branches of the administration, difficult relations which had long weakened the authority of the police. Most notably, section 4 of the Police Act, 1861 had given district magistrates considerable authority to intervene in police work.³⁹ Sir Reginald now

³⁸ Duplicate letter (No. B.1761/45) from R.H. Dorman-Smith to the Right Honourable L.S. Amery, M.P., Secretary of State for Burma, in Future administration of the Burma Police.

³⁹ 'The administration of the police throughout the local jurisdiction of the Magistrate of the district shall, under the general control and direction of such Magistrate, be vested in a District Superintendent and such Assistant District Superintendents as the Local

proposed that district magistrates must remain 'the final authority in matters of general policy' only. Over the previous decades, police work had become highly specialized, and now required a considerable number of quite specific skills: in explosives, and experts in handwriting, footprints, fingerprints and photographs, often a reflection of the increasing use of science in the detection of criminals.⁴⁰ This demanded that the police should have full control over their own work, in order to restore their confidence and generate an *esprit de corps* among police officers. In other words, while district magistrates were undoubtedly the final authority, the Committee at Simla argued that the post-war government should 'let the [police] force ... run its own show.' District magistrates should no longer be given authority to interfere with the internal administration of the police.⁴¹

When the exiled government returned to Burma in October 1945, it found that much had changed, not least roads, bridges, and buildings were now rubble. But it is doubtful whether the plans for the reconstruction of the police in a Burma restored to British rule could be put into effect at all: for the chances were slim that the British administration would invest either effort or public funds in yet another police re-organization, particularly

Government shall consider necessary,' quoted in Despatch No. 30, from Governor of Burma to L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for Burma, Simla, 30 June 1943, The position of the District Magistrate, in Future administration of the Burma Police.

⁴⁰ R.M. Ghosal, "Science and Detection in Burma," *The Burma Police Journal*, 1 (April 1938), p. 35.

⁴¹ Despatch No. 30, from Governor of Burma to L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for Burma, Simla, 30 June 1943, The position of the District Magistrate.

when the final departure of the colonial government was now so close. The forced period of exile from 1942 had at least given the British an opportunity to reflect on the weaknesses of the structures they had built in Burma from the late 19th century, with respect to the police but in many other areas of administration too. Had the reconstruction of the police, contemplated in the first half of the 1940s, been carried through earlier, then almost certainly, the character of late colonial politics, and indeed the politics of independent Burma may well have been significantly different.

Having now examined the past weaknesses of the Burma police as assessed, or rather admitted, by the colonial government themselves, as they were stepping out of Burma in the mid-1940s as a final reflection of the crucial issues this thesis has attempted to address, it is now time to briefly reiterate the points previously discussed and, where necessary, to emphasize them again. After discussing the composition of the police in colonial Burma, in particular its ethnic divisions; the re-organization of the police in the late 19th century; the living conditions of the Upper Burma military police; and the police and the suppression of crime in the first few decades of the 20th century, perhaps the most turbulent years for British rule in Burma, it is now possible to return to the three issues that were outlined at the end of the introduction. The issues are the question of consent, the models for colonial policing, and, finally the difficult question of assessing the effectiveness or success of policing in a colonial context.

Let us begin by examining the first issue. Generally speaking, the British believed that effective policing, at home and in the Empire, required a measure of consent on the part of the 'lawless' population being policed.

However, in colonial Burma, the two elements dominant in the police were both foreign, the British and Indian. Although a large number of Burmans were recruited into the police, their role in confronting crime was marginal. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, there was a high proportion of Burmans in the police but they performed particular, at times limited roles. Indeed they were not in confrontational roles. And crucially they did not undertake roles that required consent, such as investigative work that could bring them into conflict with the local population. Of course the British saw the Burmans' potential in securing local knowledge, particularly when the language used by British police officers and indeed Indian and Burmese constables was by and large Hindustani. The gloomy fact was that few of the *pukka sahibs* and the Indian subordinates could barely communicate with the society it was policing. This is reflected in the testimony of U Ba Aye, a former police officer, who was adamant that the largely-foreign military police were substantially dependent upon the supporting work of the Burman-dominated civil police.⁴²

The work of the civil police did not significantly require the consent of the local population because it was predominantly administrative rather than investigative. From the early colonial perspective, the restriction of the Burmans to the civil police reflected the British distrust of the Burman ability to take on more responsible roles. And because the British did not have much faith in the efficiency or effectiveness of the Burman in the police, but also because of budgetary pressures, from an early point in the

⁴² U Ba Aye B.P. (Class I), I.C.S. (Retired), interview, Rangoon, 20 January 2009.

colonial experience, the British became convinced that the rural population would need to police themselves.

As discussed in Chapter 3, from the 1880s the British attempted to make the rural Burmese responsible for their own policing through a revitalization of what the British saw as the traditional village structure. Two separate British Burma village administration acts were separately enforced in Upper and Lower Burma. The first, the Upper Burma Village Regulation, was introduced in the more disturbed and thinly policed Upper Burma in 1887. The significance of this act was that it gave authority to the Deputy Commissioner of Police to appoint village headmen. And now as a representative of the colonial government, village headmen were responsible for preventing petty crime in their villages, and for reporting 'local information' to higher authorities, for example serious criminal acts and suspicious characters to the nearest police station. The village administration act in Lower Burma, the Lower Burma Village Act, was implemented in 1889. It is difficult to judge the success of village policing, although there were constant complaints from the British that the Burmese would not police themselves, and certainly that they made little attempt to defend themselves against dacoits or gang robbers.

Although the Upper and Lower Burma village acts both aimed to strengthen the preventive sections of the law, in essence, they targeted different levels and elements within the village. While the Upper Burma Village Regulation placed emphasis on the highest level of village administration, the village headmen, as the foundation of colonial judicial practice, the focus of the Lower Burma Village Act was on the village

population, regarded by the colonial government as assisting, if passively, the gangs of dacoits who worked the rural districts. The colonial suspicion that Burmese villagers were simply indifferent, or scared, led the government to tighten its preventive methods of policing. As a result, there was stricter crime prevention and heavier punishment.

Having shifted responsibility for policing in rural Burma onto the population itself, British policing in colonial Burma therefore focused principally on the urban areas, where, of course, foreign economic interests were concentrated. In other words, it is clear that the British no longer gave a high priority to policing rural Burma. This contrasts sharply with the vigorous emphasis put on policing in rural India. As argued by David Arnold and Peter Robb, although rural policing in Madras (for Arnold) and Bengal and Bihar (for Robb) was generally known to be weak, it was crime in the countryside that was 'the greatest challenge to colonial authority', insurrection and agrarian riots remaining an integral obstacle to law and order. And David Arnold reminds us that policing in the countryside in Madras usually involved the use of severe coercion.

The second issue involves the complex argument of models of policing. In all this research on policing in colonial Burma, I came across no explicit discussion of empire-wide policing models. The British and Indians who occupied the senior levels of the police in colonial Burma were fully aware that they would not be able to secure consent, especially in Lower Burma. Coercion was therefore inevitable in these circumstances. At the same time, the most extreme form of coercion, shooting into a crowd, occurred only rarely in Burma, but, as mentioned, it happened more commonly towards

the end of British rule with greater nationalist agitation. It might be argued that day to day policing, investigative policing, was in essence coercive in Burma because it was undertaken by alien forces, comprising the British and Indians. At the same time, there were occasions where considerable force was needed to quell severe unrest. Moreover, insurgencies, such as that of Hsaya San, required heavily-armed military forces but not the police. In these larger disturbances, involving state security and government stability, the role of the police was marginally.

Throughout the colonial period, policing in Burma appears to have been less coercive than elsewhere in the British Empire. At the same time, from the early 20th century there was more violent opposition towards British rule, and more tense relations between Indians and Burmese. In other words, Burma became more difficult to police. And as racial tension rose, the Burmans became more conscious of the alien police. The Indian police did not have much trouble with the often docile Indian population. But the two great explosions in the 1930s, in 1930 and 1938, were caused by the Burmese.

It is important to emphasize again that coercion is an extremely complex issue. Logically, differences of language and culture between the police and those being policed must bring a degree of coercion. But in colonial Burma, coercion was restricted to particular areas, especially those with a lower density of policing and limited racial tension. The focus of policing in late colonial Burma was thus on the urban and industrialized areas, the areas of British investment and commercial interest, and indeed the areas where most Europeans were resident.

The annual police reports contain near-endless narratives of dacoities and of the criminality of the Burmese. In the Burma Police Journal, however, many of the dacoit hunts by the police are fictionalized and, at times, 'mythified'. Stories of Gaung Gyi, the legendary dacoit leader (see Chapter 5) are constantly retold. But at the same time there was little action taken against such serious crime. Rural lawlessness was a government obsession: but it was clearly beyond the government's control.

There is little evidence to show that rural lawlessness actually affected British trade interests, or the modern economy more broadly. Dacoits murdered and robbed, and on occasion they murdered British officials: but they did not steal crops or, in fact, seriously disrupt cultivation. It is striking that even the outbreak of Hsaya San Rebellion, which went on for more than two years, did not significantly disrupt the cultivation or export of rice. Although the urban disturbances in the 1930s, as seen in Chapter 6, caused considerable loss of life and some damage to property, they do not appear to have significantly interrupted Burma's commercial progress. The government declared martial law, the Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act, to maintain the social and political order, not to protect its economic interests.

This leads us to the final issue: how is the effectiveness, the success, of policing to be assessed in colonial Burma. In no society, of course, would the complete eradication of crime be seen as an achievable objective. For the Burma Police, as for police elsewhere, it is a matter of degree, and perhaps of kind. In an exceptional province of British India like Burma where the country was predominantly policed by foreigners, success in policing could

not only be assessed from a decrease in crime, an arrest of the most notorious criminals or the introduction of more advanced science of detection, but the internal economy was also one of the most challenging aspects of policing. As Chapter 4 has illustrated, success of the Indian military police in Upper Burma also relied heavily from the adequate provision of Indian staple food which brought about an large extent of change in financial and administrative arrangements in the Burma police.

But even when the military police and the rest of the police force received sufficient food and pay, there was another outward aspect of policing that greatly undermined the police power in Burma: the relationship between the police and the Burmese population was undoubtedly poor. And there is much evidence that serious crime, the murders, assaults, armed robberies and dacoity, remained a major feature of, in particular, rural Burma. It must also be said that, in the final decades of British rule, the Burmese press was highly critical of the police, to the extent that the colonial administration commonly dismissed criticism of the police as little more than nationalist agitation, and on that ground hardly worth considering. At the same time, 'malicious' press reports on the police could pose a threat to the social order, as in the 1938 Rangoon riots, and, at a deeper level, did no doubt disturb British confidence in the ability of colonial administration to bring order and prosperity to Burma. Peter Robb has suggested that the colonial police existed 'to impress the crowds rather than to investigate crime'. And indeed, in colonial Burma, the core function of the police was to maintain a measure of social and political order – to be an iconic symbol – rather than, or more than, investigate serious crime. After all, colonial Burma was highly prosperous, for British interests, even if crime was rife.

Glossary

<i>Ahmudan</i>	Crown service men
<i>Amchoor</i>	Mango powder
<i>A-pyit</i>	Misdeed (as in Buddhism)
<i>Asiyin</i>	Judicial officer
<i>Athin</i>	Village association
<i>Atta</i>	A type of wheat flour used to make a variety of South Asian bread
<i>Athi</i>	Non-service men/tax-paying people
<i>Bo</i>	Commander, leader of a group of people
<i>Chettier</i>	Indian moneylender
<i>Coringhee</i>	An ethnic group, consisted mainly among the Telugus, from Southern India that was prominent as labourers in Burma's major cities
<i>Daal</i>	Prepared pulses used mainly in South Asian and Middle-Eastern dishes
<i>Dobama Asiayone</i>	'We Burmans Association', a Burmese nationalist organization established in 1930
<i>Gaung</i>	A kind of rural police officer
<i>Ghee</i>	Clarified butter common in South Asian cooking
<i>Hluttaw</i>	Highest organ of traditional Burmese administration
<i>Ijabkabul</i>	An offer and an acceptance with two witnesses (in Muslim marriage)

<i>Jagirdar</i>	A form of land tenancy system actively used in Mughal India
<i>Kyun-ok</i>	Circle headmen
<i>Kala</i>	An offensive term in Burmese that refers to Indians
<i>Kempeitai</i>	Japanese military police during the Second World War
<i>Kin</i>	Watch-posts, outpost
<i>Kyauk</i>	Heads of division
<i>Kyaukdaik</i>	Buddhist monastery
<i>Kyedangyi</i>	A kind of village police officer
<i>Minlaung</i>	A millenarian concept of king-to-be or pretender
<i>Mye-daing</i>	Land officer
<i>Myo</i>	Town, city
<i>Myothugyi</i>	Headmen of small towns
<i>Myo-wun</i>	Governor of town
<i>Myo-za</i>	Appanage holder
<i>Patel</i>	Village police officer in certain parts of India
<i>Pongyi</i>	Buddhist monk
<i>Pongyi kyaung</i>	Buddhist temple
<i>Pukka sahib</i>	A Hindi word for 'master' used by Indians when addressing to Europeans in British India (except Burma – see ' <i>Thakin</i> ' below)
<i>Ryot</i>	Cultivator peasants in India

<i>Sabape</i>	Advanced payment in rice and sometimes money when workers used up all the rice before the end of the harvest season
<i>Sadhu</i>	Yogi in Hinduism
<i>Sangha</i>	Buddhist monastic order
<i>Sawbwa</i>	Local rulers in the Shan States
<i>Sayadaw</i>	Well-respected senior monk
<i>Sepoy</i>	Indian soldiers
<i>Shiko</i>	A way to pay respect to Buddha statue, monks and elderly people by putting palms together to roughly form a lotus shape and bending the body slightly forward
<i>Sitke</i>	Superintendents, the highest local officer who reported directly to European police officers
<i>Sit-tan</i>	Royal inquests of the Konbaung era
<i>Taik</i>	A circle of villages
<i>Taluqdar</i>	Land holders responsible for tax collection in the district during the Mughal and British colonial eras
<i>Tari</i>	Distilled spirit made from toddy
<i>Tawgaung</i>	Special district officer
<i>Taw-ke</i>	Forests land officer
<i>Ten-house gaung</i>	Head of a small village of around 10-15 households
<i>Thana</i>	Police station
<i>Ti</i>	Burmese lottery

<i>Thathameda</i>	Capitation tax
<i>Thakin</i>	A rather sarcastic Burmese term meaning ‘lord’ or ‘master’ used by Burmese when addressing to Europeans in British Burma
<i>Thugyi</i>	Hereditary village chief
<i>Waing</i>	Circle or a group of people gathered to do something, i.e. a gambling <i>waing</i>
<i>Wun</i>	Officials, officers
<i>Yazawutgaung</i>	A type of village police officer
<i>Ywa-gaung</i>	Headmen of small villages, village police officer
<i>Ywa-oke</i>	See <i>ywa-gaung</i>
<i>Zamindar</i>	Indian noble who held large tracts of land and collected taxes from peasants
<i>Zerbadi</i>	Burmese Muslims usually the product of inter-marriage between Indian Muslim men and Burmese Buddhist women

Bibliography

Primary sources

India Office Library and Records

- **Government Proceedings (IOLR/P)**

British Burma Home Proceedings for 1887-1924: IOLR/P/2882-11381

Confidential Proceedings (Police), July 1918: IOLR/P/CONF/38

Police Proceedings, September 1904: IOLR/P/6739

- **Departmental Records, Public and Judicial Department (L/PJ)**

Act to amend law relating to district cesses and rural police in British Burma: IOLR/L/PJ/6/7 File 348

An Enquiry into the Causes of Crime in the Tharrawaddy District and a Search for their Remedy, in Reference – Letter No. 702T, dated the 25th May 1916, from the Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma, to the Commissioner of the Pegu Division: IOLR/L/PJ/6/1675

As to increase in crime in Burma during last years & if so, of what nature: IOLR/PJ/6/1922 File 1296.

Burma Gambling Act, 1899: IOLR/L/PJ/6/501 File 275

Confidential note on crime in some districts of Burma by Sir Harcourt Butler, 1924: IOLR/L/PJ/6/1881 File 2406

Despatch No.25 of 1887 from the Department of Finance and Commerce, Government of India, to the Right Honourable Viscount Cross, the Secretary of State for India, dated Calcutta, 1 February 1887, Note by Mr. G. J. S. Hodgkinson, Commissioner on special duty, 24 May 1886: IOLR/L/PJ/6/195 File 321

Lower Burma Village Act, 1889: IOLR/L/PJ/6/246 File 388

No disturbances in Burma, following arrest of Gandhi, on 5/5 or 6/5: IOLR/L/PJ/6/2006 File 2290

Outrages on Indian agriculturalists in the Pegu and Toungoo districts of Burma in March 1931: IOLR/L/PJ/7/124

Statement of objects and reasons [for the implementation of the Lower Burma Rural Police Bill], C. U. Aitchinson: IOLR/PJ/6/239 File 1754

The Burma Habitual Offenders Restriction Act Repealing Act 1935: IOLR/L/PJ/7/1036

The Lower Burma Village Act, 1889: IOLR/L/PJ/6/246 File 388

- **Burma Office Records (IOLR/M)**

Burma riots: situation reports: IOLR/M/3/513

Burma riots: Committee of Enquiry; Riot Enquiry Committee Ordinance; Indians in Burma; claims for damage during riots IOLR/M/3/514

Burma riots: Governor's use of emergency powers; enactment of Rangoon (Emergency) Security Act: IOLR/M/3/515

Future Administration of the Burma Police, 3362/46: IOLR/M/4/1796
Mandalay Incident Enquiry Committee Ordinance (Ordinance II 1939): IOLR/M/3/614

Notes of dissent from the Report of the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee by U Tin Tut, I.C.S., dated 29 May 1943: IOLR/M/4/1769

Report of the Burma Police Reconstruction Committee [no date and printing place given]: IOLR/M/4/1796

Strike of Police and other Government Servants. Secretary of State's memorandum of 17 September 1946, Cabinet Papers: IOLR/M/4/1806

- **European Manuscript (IOLR/Mss/Eur)**

Sir Charles Crosthwaite to Sir Herbert Thirkell White, 4 April 1887: IOLR/Mss Eur E254/1

- **Home Miscellaneous (IOLR/H)**

The Burmese War 1823-1828: IOLR/H/667

National Archives Department Myanmar

Cadre of Police Officers for Upper Burma [Confidential], Memorandum by C. Bernard, 25 January 1886: NADM File No 582 A

Re-organisation of the Police file: NADM 4/1 (22) 1318

Organization of the Police Establishments in Pegu: Memorandum on the constitution of the Police Establishment in British India, 1860: NADM RG 1/1 (A) Acc No 541, File No 44

National Library of Scotland

A.D. Cochrane, Governor of Burma, to Marquess of Zetland, 30 July 1938: Acc 10218, Box 11 (3)

Sir Walter's advice to the Governor of Burma and the Secretary of State for Burma: Acc 10218 Box 9 (3)

Published primary sources

Burma, *Burma Gazetteer Volume B, Akyab, Bassein, Hanthawaddy (Syriam), Pegu, Prome, Tharrawaddy, and Thayetmyo*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1912-1913

———. *Criminal Investigation Department Manual, Part IV*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1923

———. *Final Report of the Riot Inquiry Committee*, Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary, 1939

———. *Interim Report of the Riot Enquiry Committee*, Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationary, 1939

———. *Manual of Preventive Law 1925*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1925

———. *Pamphlet of Instructions for the Working of the Habitual Offenders Restriction Act (Burma Act No. II of 1919) by Police Officers*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1922

———. *Report of the Committee appointed to consider the Treatment of Juvenile Delinquency in Burma*. Rangoon: Printing and Stationary, 1928

———. *Report of the Crime Enquiry Committee*. Maymyo: Government Branch Press, 1923

Burma. *Report of the Police Supply and Clothing Department for the years 1890-1940*. Rangoon: Government Printing

———. *Report on the Administration of Burma* [title varies]. Rangoon: Government Printing

———. *Report on the Burma Police Enquiry Committee 1924*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1924

———. *Report on the Excise Administration in Burma during the Year 1922-23*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1924

———. *Report on the Police Administration of British Burma* [title varies, including *Report on the Police Administration of Lower Burma*, from 1885-87, and *Report on the Police Administration of Upper Burma for the Year 1887*]. Rangoon: Government Printing

———. *Report on the Police Administration in the Bengal Presidency for the Year 1920*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1921

———. *Report on the Police Administration in the Bengal Presidency for the Year 1927*. Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1928

———. *Report on Violent Crime in Lower Burma during the 1st Quarter of 1888, by the Inspector-General of Police, with the Orders of the Chief Commissioner thereon*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1888

———. *Selected Correspondence for the years 1825-1826 to 1842-1943 in the Office of the Commissioner Tenasserim Division*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1928

———. *The Abridged Law Manual for Sub-Inspectors of Police, Burma*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1926

———. *The Burma Village Manual*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1917

Grantham, S. G. (comp.), *Burma Gazetteer Tharrawaddy District, Volume A*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1920

———. *Census of India 1921 Vol. 10 Burma: Part I*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1923

Kipling, Rudyard, *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*. Ware: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994

Marquis of Dalhousie, *The Dalhousie-Phayre Correspondence, 1852-1856*, edited by D.G.E. Hall. London: Oxford University Press, 1932

Orwell, George, *Burmese Days*. London: Penguin Books, 1989

Paterson, Alexander, *Report on the prevention of crime and the treatment of the criminal in the Province of Burma*. Rangoon: Government Printing, 1927

Rao, P. Hari, *The Indian Police Act (Act V of 1861) and the Indian Police Act (III of 1888) and the Police (Incitement to Disaffection) Act (XXII of 1922) with Commentaries and Notes of Case-Law thereon*. Triplicane: Madras, 1927

Sangermano, Father. *The Burmese Empire a hundred years ago*. London: Archibald Constable, 1893

Newspapers

British newspapers: *Manchester Guardian, Observer, Times*

English-language newspapers in Burma: *Rangoon Gazette*

Burmese-language newspapers: (Rangoon) *Thuriya*, Mandalay Sun

Other newspapers: *New York Times*

Secondary sources

Dictionaries

Bernot, Denise, *Dictionnaire Birman-Français*. Paris: SELAP, 1978-92

Department of the Myanmar Language Commission, *Myanmar-English Dictionary*. Rangoon: Ministry of Education, 2001

Judson, Adoniram, *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary*. Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1921

U Hoke Sein, *The Universal Burmese-English-Pali Dictionary*. Rangoon: Myitzythaka Sarpay, 1981

Journal articles

Anon., "Burma's Open Door," *All the World*, July/September 1922

Anon., "The Army's work in Rangoon," *All the World*, March 1920

Arnold, David, "The Armed Police and Colonial Control in South India, 1914-1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 11 (1977)

Arnold, David, "The Police and Colonial Control in South India," *Social Scientist* 12 (1976)

Baden-Powell, B.H., "The Origin of Zamindari Estates in Bengal," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 11 (1896)

Bandyopadhyay, Rekha, "Land System in India: A Historical Review," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52 (1993)

Brown, Ian, "A commissioner calls: Alexander Paterson and colonial Burma's prisons," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38 (2007)

Charney, Michael, "Some Documents of Tharrawaddy's Reign: 1837-1846, Part I," *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research* 1 (2003)

Constable, Philip, "The marginalization of a Dalit martial race in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 60 (2001)

Egreteau, Renaud, "Burmese Indians in contemporary Burma: heritage, influence, and perceptions since 1988," *Asian Ethnicity* 12 (2011)

Ghosal, R.M., "Science and Detection in Burma," *The Burma Police Journal* 1 (1938)

Hall, R. M., "Early days in the police in Arakan, 1825-1828," *Journal of Burma Research Society* 28 (1938)

Larkin, Emma, "The Self-Conscious Censor Censorship in Burma under the British, 1900-1939," *Journal of Burma Studies* 8 (2003)

Parsons, Timothy H., "'Wakamba warriors are soldiers of the Queen': the evolution of the Kamba as a martial race, 1890-1970," *Ethnohistory* 46 (1999)

Tolen, Rachel J., "Colonizing and transforming the criminal tribesman: the Salvation Army in British India," *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991)

Books

Adas, Michael, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852-1941*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1974

Anderson, David and Killingray, David (ed), *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917-65*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992

_____, *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991

Andrew, E.J.L., *Indian Labour in Rangoon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933

Andrus, J. R., *Burmese Economic Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1948

Arnold, David, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859-1947*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986

Aung-Thwin, Maitrii, *The Return of the Galon King: History, Law, and Rebellion in Colonial Burma*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011

Breathnach, Séamus, *The Irish Police from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Dublin: Anvil Books, 1974

Burma Research Group, *Burma and Japan: Basic Studies on their Cultural and Social Structure*. Tokyo: Toyota Foundation, 1987

Cady, John F., *A History of Modern Burma*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958

Callahan, Mary, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005

Chakravarti, Nalini, *The Indian Minority in Burma: the Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971

Cheng Siok-Hwa, *The Rice Industry of Burma*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967

Christian, John L., *Burma*. London: Collins, 1945

Clayton, Anthony and Killingray, David (ed.), *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1989

Collis, Maurice, *Last and First in Burma (1941-1948)*. London: Faber and Faber, 1956

———. *Trials in Burma*. London: Penguin Books, 1945

Crosthwaite, Sir Charles, *The Pacification of Burma*. London: Edward Arnold, 1912

Dautremere, Joseph, *Burma under British Rule*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913

Enriquez, C.M., Major, *ABC of Burma: Part I, The Country*. Karachi: Modern Publishing & Co., 1943

———. *Races of Burma*. Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1924

———. *The Races of Burma*. Bombay: G. Claridge & Co. Ltd., 1924

Fielding-Hall, Harold, *The Soul of a People*. London: Macmillan, 3rd ed., 1903

Furnivall, J. S., *An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma*. Rangoon: People's Literature Committee & House, 3rd ed., 1957

———. *Colonial Policy and Practice*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1948

———. *Reconstruction in Burma*. S.I.: s.n., 1943

Gouger, Henry, *Personal Narrative of Two Years' Imprisonment in Burmah*. London, 1860, [reprinted Bangkok: White Lotus, 2003]

Grantham, S., *Studies in the History of Tharrawaddy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920

Griffin, Andrew, *A Brief Guide to Sources for the Study of Burma in the India Office Records*. London: India Office Library & Records, 1979

Harvey, G. E., *British Rule in Burma*. London: Faber and Faber, 1946

Heathcote, T. A., *The Indian Army: The Garrison of British Imperial India, 1822-1922*. London: Hippocrene, 1974

Herbert, Patricia, *The Hsaya San Rebellion (1930-1932), Reappraisal*. Working Papers No. 27, Melbourne: Monash University, 1982

Ma Ma Lay, Journal Gyaw, *A Man Like Him: Portrait of the Burmese Journalist, Journal Kyaw U Chit Maung*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2009

Ma Mya Sein, *The Administration of Burma*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973

Marriott, John and Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay, (ed), *Britain in India Vol.I*. London: Pikerling & Chatto, 2006

Maung Shein, *Burma's Transport and Foreign Trade (1885-1914)*. Rangoon: University of Rangoon, 1964

Merriam, E. F., *Races of Burma*. Boston: American Baptist Missionary Union, 3rd ed., 1893

Nisbet, John, *Burma under British Rule and Before, Vol .I*. London: Archibald Constable, 1901

Omissi, David, *The Sepoy and the Raj: the Indian Army, 1860-1940*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994

Radhakhrisna, Meena, *Dishonoured by History: 'Criminal Tribes' and British Colonial Policy*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001

Scott, Sir James George, *Burma: A Guide to Practical Information*. London: Alexander Moring, 1906

. *The Burman: his Life and Notions*. London: Macmillan, 1882

Selth, Andrew, *Burma's Muslims: Terrorists or Terrorised?*. Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, the Australian National University, 2003

Sinclair, Georgina, *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006

Singh, Madan Paul, *Indian Army Under the East India Company*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1976

Smith, Solveig, *By Love Compelled: the Story of 100 years of the Salvation Army in India and Adjacent Countries*. London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1981

Stevenson, H.N.C., *The Hills Peoples of Burma*. London: Longmans, Green, 1944

Streets, Heather, *Martial Races: the Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004

Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001

The Burma Social Association, *The Shoe and the Shiko – being a compilation of the shiko literature in Burma*. Rangoon: The Irrawaddy Press, 1913

Tinker, Hugh (ed.), *Burma: The Struggle for Independence 1944-1948, Volume II*. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1984

Trager, Frank N. and Koenig, William J., *Burmese Sit-tāns 1764-1826: Records of Rural Life and Administration*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979

Tydd, W.H. *Peacock Dreams*. London: BACSA, 1986

U Ohn Kyaw, *Lecture on Crime in Burma from 1899 to 1935*. Rangoon: The New Burma Press, 1937

White, A.J.S., *The Burma of 'AJ'*. London: BACSA, 1991

White, Sir Herbert Thirkell, *A Civil Servant in Burma*. London: Edward Arnold, 1913

Yang, Anand A. (ed.), *Crime and Criminality in British India*. Tucson, Arizona: The Association for Asian Studies, 1985

Unpublished dissertations

Aung Myo, "Police Administration in Myanmar (1885-1945)" (PhD diss., University of Mandalay, 2007)

Kyaw Yin, "The Foundations of Public Administration in Burma: A Study in Social and Historical Perspectives", (PhD diss., New York University, 1963)

Nigum, Sanjay, "A Social History of a Colonial Stereotype: the Criminal Tribes and Castes of Uttar Pradesh, 1871-1930", (PhD diss., University of London, 1988)

Website

"Rangoon Police Strike," Commons and Lords Hansard, the Official Report of debates in British Parliament, HC Deb 04 November 1946, Vol 428, cc170-1W, https://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1946/nov/04/rangoon-police-strike

Interviews

U Ba Aye B.P. (Class I), Rangoon, 20 January 2009

U Khin Maung Maung B.P. (Class I), Commissioner of Police (Retired),
Rangoon, 7 January 2009